

◆ 75 YEARS SINCE VICTORY IN EUROPE ◆

# Bringing History to Life

**PART 1**  
~ How the war began ~

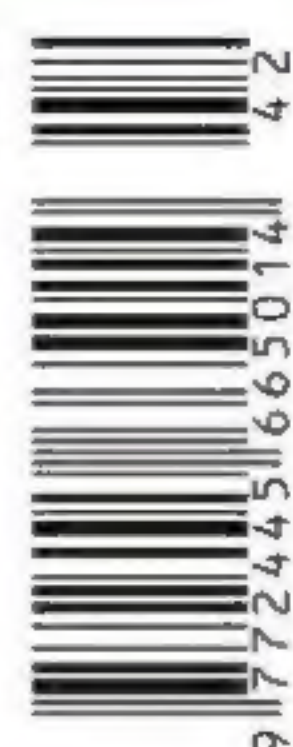
**Hitler's army  
stormed  
through  
Europe**

France, Belgium  
and Holland fell  
in six weeks

# BLITZKRIEG

ATTACK ON POLAND • STALIN'S DEFEAT • SPITFIRE VS MESSERSCHMITT

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**RACE  
FOR  
NORWAY**

Churchill and Hitler fought for  
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**SCAPA FLOW**

German U-boat sneaked  
into British naval base



**DUNKIRK  
80TH  
ANNIVERSARY**

ELITE UNIT CAPTURED 'IMPREGNABLE' BELGIAN FORT









# »» Lightning war rolled through Europe

On 1st September 1939, Hitler invaded Poland. The country needed to be subjugated quickly before Britain and France could intervene. Germany's Panzer divisions proved unstoppable. Backed by the Luftwaffe, they smashed through Poland's defences, destroying roads, bridges and radio stations.

The Polish defended valiantly, but were eventually forced to surrender. By 6th October, Poland was in

German hands. In spring 1940, the blitzkrieg rolled through Europe again – within a few months, France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Norway all fell. But when Hitler attacked Britain, he discovered the British were tougher than expected.

This issue of *Bringing History to Life* tracks the Germans' early advances to discover how a relatively small nation could take a continent by storm.



An aerial, black-and-white photograph showing a large number of German military vehicles, including tanks and trucks, moving across a flat, open landscape. The vehicles are arranged in loose formations, and the terrain appears to be a mix of dirt and sparse vegetation. The perspective is from a high angle, looking down on the scene.

## German tanks roar forward



A brand new tactic makes the Germans almost invincible in the war's first year. Country after country falls to Hitler. Follow the blitzkrieg war in Europe on page 6

# 1939-40





## 1939

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**4TH JANUARY:** Hermann Göring appoints Reinhard Heydrich to lead the operation to eradicate all Jews from Europe.

**24TH JANUARY:** Earthquake in Concepción, Chile. 30,000 people perish.

**26TH JANUARY:** General Franco's Falangists capture Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War.

**30TH JANUARY:** Adolf Hitler openly threatens the Jews in a speech at the German Reichstag.

**6TH FEBRUARY:** The Spanish democratic government flees to France.

**15TH FEBRUARY:** Germans launch the *Bismarck* battleship.

**16TH MARCH:** Nazi Germany occupies Czechoslovakia.

**21ST MARCH:** Hitler demands that Gdansk, which has been administered by the League of Nations since World War I, is returned to Germany.

**MARCH 28:** The Spanish Civil War ends with Madrid's capture.

### Youngsters in uniform

**5TH APRIL:** New law requires German teenage boys to join the Hitler Youth.



**6TH APRIL:** Britain and Poland make a pact to secure Poland against a German invasion.

**7TH APRIL:** Italy invades the Kingdom of Albania.

### Novel about US crisis

**14TH APRIL:** John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* is published.



**17TH APRIL:** Soviet leader Joseph Stalin signs an anti-Nazi pact with France and Britain.

**7TH MAY:** Italy and Nazi Germany announce an alliance known as the Rome-Berlin Axis.

**JUNE:** The first *Superman* comic book is published.

**17TH JUNE:** The guillotine takes its last victim. Eugen Weidmann is convicted of serial murders and executed in Versailles.

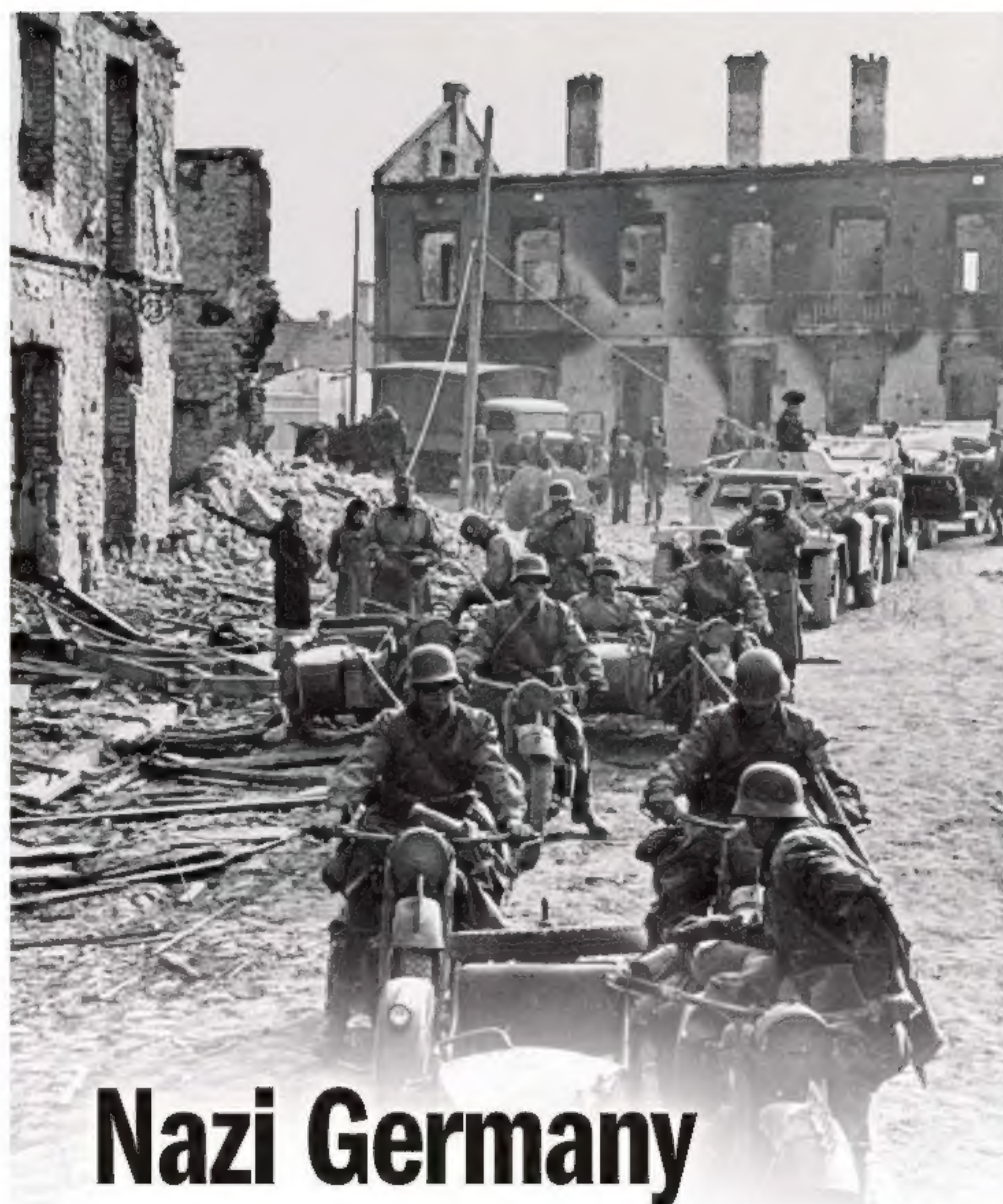
**19TH JULY:** Frank Sinatra makes his recording debut.

**23RD AUGUST:** Germany and the Soviets sign the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a non-aggression treaty in which the two powers agree to divide Eastern Europe between them.

**26TH AUGUST:** War seems inevitable. Belgium mobilises.

**28TH AUGUST:** The Netherlands begins gathering its forces.

**30TH AUGUST:** Poland mobilises its army.



## Nazi Germany invades Poland

**1ST SEPTEMBER** Hitler needs to capture Poland quickly before its allies can intervene. His plan is successful, inviting Germany's secret pact-partner, the Soviet Union, to cross the border and share the spoils.

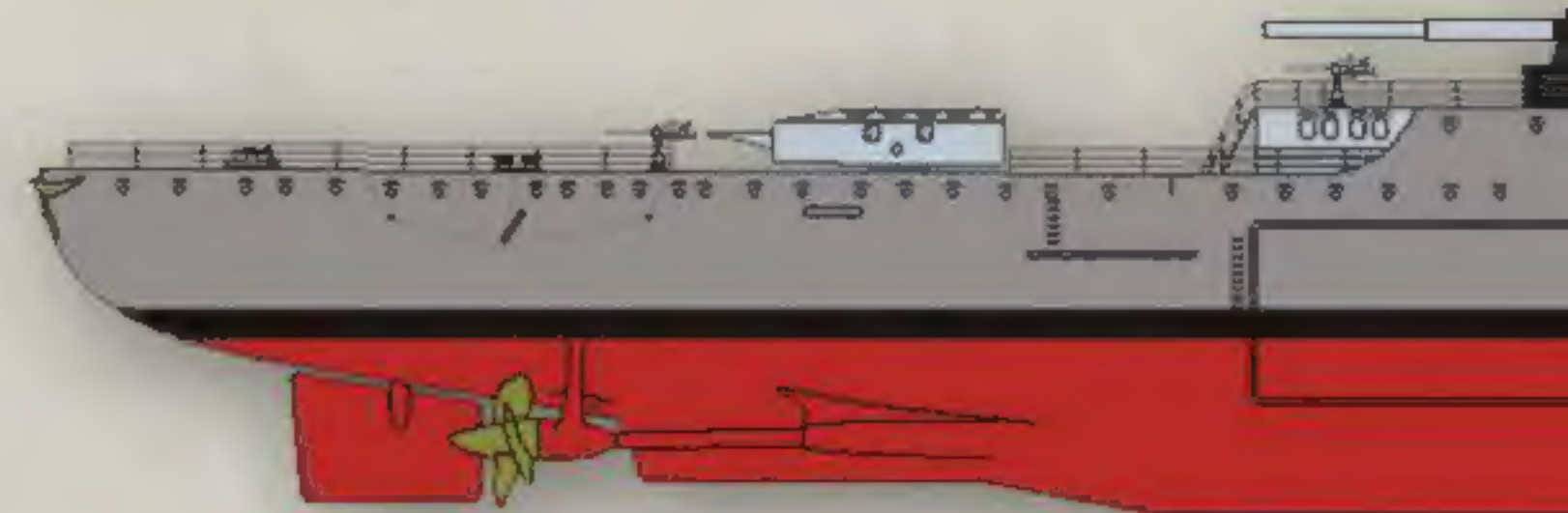
**3RD SEPTEMBER:** Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada declare war on Nazi Germany.

**4TH SEPTEMBER:** The RAF bombs Nazi warships off the coast of Germany in the first Allied action of the war.

**11TH SEPTEMBER:** Iraq and Saudi Arabia – both important oil-producing countries – declare war on Nazi Germany.

**17TH SEPTEMBER:** The Soviets invade Poland, part of which is already occupied by Germany. 210,000 Poles become POWs.

# 1939







## Rationing is introduced

**AUTUMN** War makes shipping commodities between nations dangerous. Petrol, food and medicine shortages follow. Most countries introduce rationing.

**27TH SEPTEMBER:** Warsaw falls to Nazi Germany.

**6TH OCTOBER:** Poland is wholly subjugated. The country is split between Nazis and the Soviets.

**11TH OCTOBER:** Albert Einstein writes to Franklin Roosevelt. The German-born Jewish scientist reveals that an A-bomb can be built and warns the president not to let the Nazis develop it first.

## German attack shakes British

**14TH OCTOBER**

A German U-boat sneaks into an 'impenetrable' British naval base at Scapa Flow and sinks the *HMS Royal Oak*, a British warship anchored there.

**24TH OCTOBER:** Nazis decree that Polish Jews must wear the yellow Star of David.

**30TH OCTOBER:** A Nazi U-boat fails in its attack on the British warship *HMS Nelson*, which is transporting Winston Churchill.

**8TH NOVEMBER:** Adolf Hitler survives an assassination attempt at the Bürgerbräukeller beer hall in Munich.

**15TH NOVEMBER:** The Nazis set about exterminating Warsaw's Jewish population.

**30TH NOVEMBER:** The Soviet Union invades Finland. Helsinki is bombed.

**1ST DECEMBER:** Himmler begins deporting Polish Jews.

**9TH DECEMBER:** Russian air raid on Helsinki.

**15TH DECEMBER:** The epic motion picture *Gone with the Wind* premieres.

## Finland agrees to Soviet peace

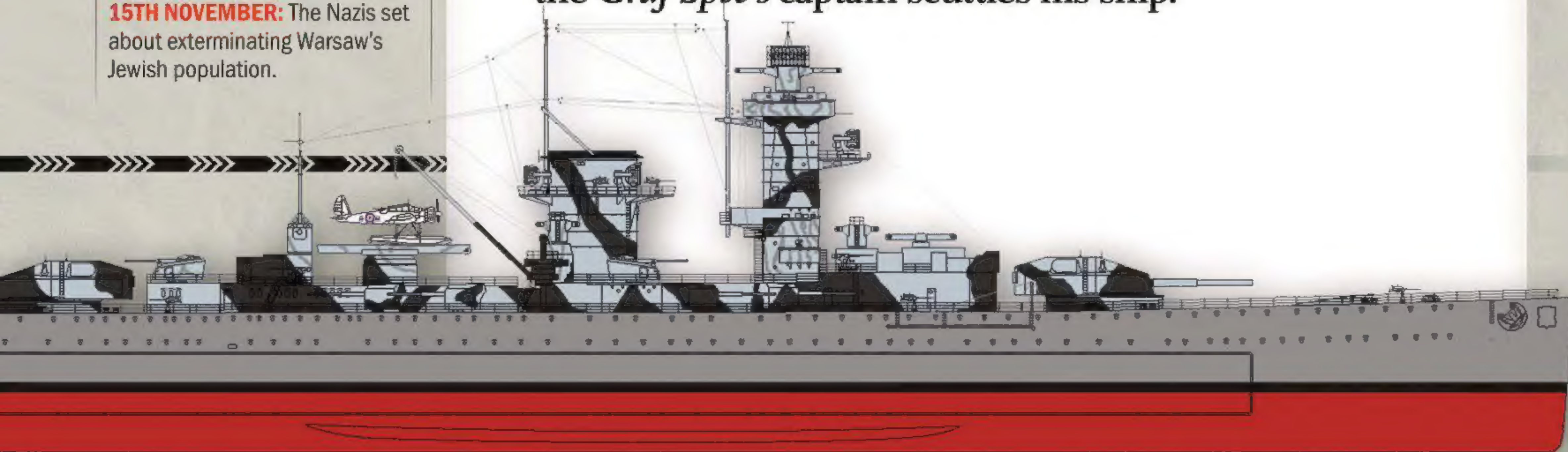
**30TH NOVEMBER**

Finland and the Soviet Union sign a peace treaty. Finland cedes land to the Soviets, but manages to hold on to its independence.



## The hunt for the Graf Spee

**17TH DECEMBER** The German warship *Graf Spee* sinks nine British ships before being trapped by the Allies. Mistakenly believing he is facing insurmountable odds, the *Graf Spee's* captain scuttles his ship.





**5TH JANUARY:** The Finns launch a counter-attack against the Soviets in the Winter War.

**8TH JANUARY:** Britain rations bacon, butter and sugar.

**11TH JANUARY:** Prokofiev's ballet *Romeo and Juliet* premieres in Russia.

**12TH JANUARY:** Soviet Union bombs cities in Finland.



### Cunning mouse outsmarts cat

**10TH FEBRUARY:** Cartoon characters Tom and Jerry make their film debut at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in the US.

**17TH FEBRUARY:** The crew of the British destroyer *HMS Cossack* boards the German *Altmark*, which has sought refuge in Jøssingfjorden in Norway. The crew frees 299 British POWs.

**23RD FEBRUARY:** The Walt Disney cartoon *Pinocchio* premieres in the US.

**29TH FEBRUARY:** The Finnish government enters peace talks with the Soviet Union to end the Winter War.



Winston Churchill

Adolf Hitler

## Struggle for the North

**7TH APRIL** German troops head for Denmark and Norway, while the British send naval vessels to the west coast of the Scandinavian peninsula. Churchill and Hitler battle to gain a vital foothold in the North.



### Slave's son on stamp

**7TH APRIL:** American Booker T Washington is the first black man to appear on a US postal stamp.



**8TH APRIL:** German warship *Scharnhorst* sinks the British aircraft carrier *HMS Glorious*.

**9TH APRIL:** The German cruiser *Blücher* is sunk by a Norwegian coastal battery in the Oslo Fjord.

### Denmark falls in record time

**9TH APRIL** In just four hours, German troops occupy Denmark, which surrenders virtually without a fight. This gives the Germans free access to Norway, which is a far more important goal for them.



## Germany secures Norway

**9TH APRIL** Norway is the key to controlling the North Atlantic. The fjords are ideal for submarine bases, and an occupation of Norway will also secure Germany's supply of iron ore from Sweden. The Germans are ready for a long, tough fight, but the Allies withdraw.



**10TH APRIL:** The founder of Norway's fascist party, Vidkun Quisling, tries to conduct a coup d'état in Norway via the radio, but the occupying Germans refuse to support his claim.

**13TH APRIL:** A naval battle rages in Narvik, Norway. The ice-free port is an important supply hub for Swedish iron ore.

**20TH APRIL:** The first electron microscope is shown in the US.

### Auschwitz gets go-ahead

**27TH APRIL:** Heinrich Himmler – who was appointed by Hitler as "Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood" – orders the construction of Auschwitz concentration camp in German-occupied Poland.

**28TH APRIL:** Rudolf Höss is appointed commander of Auschwitz concentration camp.



**29TH APRIL:** Norwegian King Håkon flees with the Norwegian government to Britain.



# Germans take 'impregnable' fort

**10TH MAY** At dawn, nine German gliders land behind the walls of Belgium's strongest fortification, Eben-Emael. Ten minutes later, the fort's massive guns are destroyed. The road to France is now open to German troops.



**10TH MAY:** Former First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, replaces Neville Chamberlain as Britain's prime minister.

**10TH MAY:** The Luftwaffe accidentally bombs the German city of Freiburg. 57 civilians are killed during the attack.

**11TH MAY:** Britain's new PM, Winston Churchill, presents his war government, a broad, Conservative-led coalition.

## Blitzkrieg seizes Europe

**12TH MAY** Germany unleashes its new lightning war tactic on France and Western Europe. Within weeks, large parts of the continent are under Nazi control. Meanwhile, the Soviets are capturing territories in the East.



**14TH MAY:** Britain boosts production of military planes. Lord Beaverbrook becomes minister of aircraft production.

**15TH MAY:** The German army marches into northern France.

## Fast food goes on sale

**15TH MAY:** McDonald's opens its first restaurant in San Bernardino, California.



## The miracle at Dunkirk

**26TH MAY** 400,000 British soldiers are surrounded by the German army in Dunkirk, France. Churchill organises a rescue mission across the English Channel.

**27TH MAY:** SS soldiers execute 97 British prisoners of war at the village of Le Paradis in France.

**2ND JUNE:** The Luftwaffe begins a massive aerial bombardment of Dunkirk on the Channel coast, while the remnants of the 400,000 British soldiers trapped there are being evacuated.

**3RD JUNE:** The last British soldiers leave Dunkirk.

**7TH JUNE:** British and French troops leave Narvik in Norway.

**9TH JUNE:** Norway surrenders to Nazi Germany.

# 1940

may



**14TH JUNE:** Auschwitz concentration camp opens for political prisoners.

**22ND JUNE:** France surrenders to Nazi Germany.

**25TH JUNE:** Hitler visits the Eiffel Tower and Napoleon's Tomb in Paris, France.

**2ND JULY:** Hitler orders the invasion of Great Britain.

**5TH JULY:** Huysmans and Jaspar attempt to form a Belgian government in exile in London.

**9TH JULY:** The British RAF bombs Germany for the first time.

**9TH JULY:** Italy and Great Britain clash at sea during the Battle of the Mediterranean.

**10TH JULY:** Pétain forms Vichy puppet government in France.

## Battle of Britain

**10TH JULY** Buoyed by his rapid victory in France, Hitler orders the invasion of Britain at the beginning of July. The RAF duels with the Luftwaffe in the air, while British civilians take refuge in air raid shelters during a relentless German bombing campaign.

**21ST JULY:** The Soviets occupy Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

**23RD JULY:** The Blitz begins. London is blasted in nightly bombing raids.

**18TH AUGUST:** The Luftwaffe and RAF meet in history's biggest air battle. 71 German aircraft are shot down.

**12TH SEPTEMBER:** Italian troops enter Egypt.

**12TH SEPTEMBER:** Four French teenagers run after their dog into a crevice in a cliff. There, they discover the Lascaux Cave with its 17,000-year-old paintings.

**26TH SEPTEMBER:** Japanese imperial troops begin their invasion of French Indochina.

**4TH OCTOBER:** Hitler and Benito Mussolini meet in the Brenner Pass in the Alps.

**8TH OCTOBER:** German troops occupy Romania.

### Comedy against Hitler

**15TH OCTOBER:** Charlie Chaplin movie *The Great Dictator* has its premiere.



**28TH OCTOBER:** The Greeks get set to rebuff an Italian invasion.

**31ST OCTOBER:** Deadline for the Jews to move into the ghetto in Warsaw, Poland.

**6TH NOVEMBER:** President Roosevelt is re-elected in the US.

**11TH NOVEMBER:** A massive British air strike wipes out half the Italian fleet.

**16TH NOVEMBER:** RAF bombs Hamburg in Germany in response to the Luftwaffe's bombing of Coventry two days earlier, which flattened two-thirds of the city and destroyed 2,300 homes.

**26TH NOVEMBER:** The Nazi regime erects a wall around the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw, Poland.

**29TH DECEMBER:** The Luftwaffe begins firebombing London.

## Europe under the yoke of Nazism

**1940** By the end of 1940, much of Europe is under Nazi rule. Some countries, for example Denmark, surrender in exchange for domestic independence. Others, such as Poland, are divided between the brutal regimes of the Soviet Union and Germany. Arbitrary massacres, attacks on civilians and other war crimes are commonplace.



*German soldiers torch  
buildings during the invasion  
of Poland to intimidate the  
population into surrendering.*



**1st SEPTEMBER**





THE INVASION OF POLAND

# GERMAN TROOPS INVADE POLAND

Adolf Hitler takes a huge gamble when he decides to attack Poland. The country must be defeated quickly to prevent Western European powers – principally Britain and France – from interfering. But the campaign does not go entirely according to the Führer's plan.



## THE STAGE IS SET

Hitler aims to clear Eastern Europe for resettlement by Aryan Germans as part of his Lebensraum policy. He has taken Austria and Czechoslovakia without a fight; next up is Poland. But while its army is antiquated, Poland has guarantees of support from France and Britain. Regardless, Hitler decides to take a chance...



**A**T DAWN ON 1ST SEPTEMBER 1939, the German battleship SMS *Schleswig-Holstein* turned its giant guns towards Westerplatte peninsula on the Polish Baltic coast near the port city of Danzig (now Gdansk). At 04.48, the guns opened up and eight shells thundered towards the south-east corner of the city's garrison, creating three large holes in its outside wall and setting its oil storage dumps ablaze.

A few minutes later, three elite divisions of German marines attacked, but the garrison's small force – numbering around 200 Polish troops – put up a stubborn resistance. At 06.22, the marines radioed the battleship to report that they were retreating following heavy losses. Two-and-a-half hours later, the marines attacked again, this time reinforced with 60 soldiers from SS-Heimwehr. They forced their way through the garrison's outer wall, but their progress was slowed by mines, felled trees, barbed wire and gunfire. By midday, the demoralised SS soldiers fled, and the marines, whose captain was wounded, had also had enough. Fighting on the first day had cost 82 Germans lives, but the peninsula didn't fall.

The Germans finally overran the headland after a week of dogged fighting, thanks to the support of a torpedo boat and



Polish military cap from 1939. The Polish army was unprepared for war.

60 aircraft, which dropped over 100 bombs. On 7th September at 09.45, the exhausted Polish defenders finally hoisted the white flag.

The entire Polish army continued to stubbornly resist despite the Germans' being the superior force on paper. The invasion comprised two armies of 882,000 and 630,000 men respectively. The first group attacked from the north, while the second advanced from the west and south. The German army was modern and well-organised, while many of the Polish units had been mobilised at the last minute.

Hitler expected a quick victory, but the Poles' robust defence spelled potential danger for the Führer's ambitions. The jokers in the pack were Britain and France – World War I's two major victors. If Hitler's army became bogged down in a protracted campaign in Poland, Germany's west flank would be left exposed. If Britain and France immediately went on the offensive, they could end the Nazi dictator's campaign before it began.

**WESTERN POWERS RULED BY FRIGHTENED MEN**  
Hitler had good reason to believe that the two great powers would hesitate, however. At the Munich Conference in 1938, he'd insisted that Czechoslovakia cede the predominantly German-speaking Sudetenland to Germany, and both French and British prime ministers – Édouard Daladier and Neville Chamberlain respectively – had agreed to his demands. Their capitulation convinced Hitler that France and Britain were ruled by frightened, easily manipulated men.

Hitler saw no reason to curtail his territorial plundering. In March 1939, he subjugated the rest of the Czech territory –

Bohemia and Moravia – and converted the Slovak part of the former Czechoslovakia into a German puppet state with free passage for German troops. His aggressive manoeuvres were forming a net around Poland, which was now surrounded by German troops on three sides.

An invasion of Poland would allow the dictator to avenge the wrongs he believed to have been committed in World War I, in

*The SS conducted a fake attack on the radio station at Gleiwitz to give Hitler a pretext to invade Poland.*

## Polen überfallen den Gleiwitzer Sender

Außländische überschritten die deutsche Grenze Kämpfe  
mit deutscher Polizei

Danzig, 31. August  
Etwa um 20 Uhr heute Abend wurde der Sender Gleiwitz durch einen polnischen Überfall heftig. Die Polen drangen mit Gewalt in den Sender ein. Es gelang ihnen, einen polnischen Funker in polnischer und zum Teil deutscher Sprache zu vernehmen. Sie wurden aber schon nach wenigen Minuten von der Polizei überwältigt. Die von Gleiwitz aus funktionsfähig gehaltenen Sender wurden durch die Polizei in Betrieb genommen, wobei es auf Seiten der Einbringung keine Verluste gab.

Danzig, 31. August  
Über die Vorgänge in Gleiwitz wird noch folgendes bekannt:  
Der Überfall auf den Sender war offensichtlich das Signal zu einem allgemeinen Aufstand polnischer Freischützer auf deutschem Gebiet. Etwa zur gleichen Zeit haben polnische Aufständische in bisher unbekannter Zahl in Danzig, an zwei weiteren Stellen die deutsche Grenze überschritten. Es handelt sich wieder um lauernde polnische Abteilungen, die auf dem Weg von regulären polnischen Truppenteilen unterführt werden.  
Abteilungen der im Grenzgebiet lebenden Einmischpolen haben sich den Eindringlingen angeschlossen.

Andererseits hat die dem genannten Sender von 11.1 auf 10.1 Wiff gen. In beiden Fällen von allen Seiten von erfolgten Herbeiführung der Funk von England kommende verlässliche Weltweit hat auch die Herrenbehold der Funk von England in Hand genommen, um nur auf dem besten Befehl. Nach dem letzten Jahr nach dem Ausbruch des Weltkrieges der lautenden Rede in veränderter Höhe ausgemerkte man die Neubewertung an der Stelle der Heften der Funk von England 21.4.25. In der letzten Nacht nur in der Nacht.




The Gleiwitz radio station's high masts meant its broadcasts could be heard through most of Europe.

Manen in jedem Fall  
streng neutral

Danzig, 31. August





*The battleship SMS Schleswig-Holstein had fought in World War I but remained fully operational.*

which Germany had been forced to cede lands to Poland, including the coal-rich region of Upper Silesia. The Treaty of Versailles had also seen the port city of Danzig become a free city administered by the People's Confederation (the forerunner of the UN). And worst of all from a German point of view, Poland had been granted the Polish Corridor. This was a stretch of land that cut between Germany and East Prussia and gave Poland access to the Baltic Sea. It was an arrangement many Germans found deeply humiliating.

In addition to the desire to regain lands lost at the end of World War I, Nazi racial ideology dictated that Germany was entitled to Lebensraum – a colonial settlement of Eastern Europe, at the expense of what the Germans perceived to be a subhuman Slavic population.

During 1939, several signs of impending aggression emerged: on 22nd March, the Germans occupied the Lithuanian port of Memel (now Klaipeda), which until 1919 had been in German hands. Hitler also demanded that Danzig be reunited with Germany and that his government be granted rights to build transport links across the Polish Corridor.

### **GUARANTEE INFURIATED HITLER**

The diplomatic row between Germany and Poland forced Britain to intervene. On 31st March in the House of Commons, Chamberlain proclaimed that Britain would support Polish independence and Danzig's continued status as a free city. The British guarantee angered Hitler. At the same time, it became clear to the Führer that Polish leaders intended to cede few – if any – concessions to Germany in the corridor, let alone voluntarily join the pro-German bloc. The Nazi dictator became convinced that the Polish question would have to be solved by military means.

By this point, Hitler had already ordered his generals to begin forming a detailed plan for an attack on Poland under the

**1.4 million**

German soldiers invaded Poland, supported by 2,600 tanks and 2,000 aircraft. Against them stood just 700,000 Polish soldiers with 750 tanks and 900 aircraft.

## **Fierce battles bolstered both sides' morale**

The garrison at Westerplatte wasn't well known in 1939, but the location of the war's first battle proved to be hugely symbolic.

**T**he Polish garrison on the Westerplatte peninsula proved far harder to defeat than German commanders had envisioned. While their eventual victory proved symbolic for the invaders, the dogged defence also played a central role in bolstering Polish morale.

The capture of Westerplatte was so important that Hitler visited the battlefield after the fighting. He inspected the ruins and went aboard the battleship *SMS Schleswig-Holstein*, which launched the bombardment.

For Polish soldiers across the country, the defence of Westerplatte gave them the faith to fight on. The garrison's heroics also had an effect on the Germans who allowed its commander, Major Henryk Sucharski, to keep his sword after surrendering.

codename *Fall Weiss* (Operation White). However, several of his commanders were sceptical and believed that Hitler's scheme was too risky. Their fears were well founded. In May 1939, Poland's Minister of Military Affairs, Lieutenant-General

Tadeusz Kasprzycki, travelled to Paris to sign the Kasprzycki-Gamelin Convention. This committed the French army to launching a massive attack on Germany with 38 divisions within 15 days of Poland being attacked. But despite the commanders' scepticism, in spring 1939 Hitler still believed that Western European powers would not intervene. The head of the Luftwaffe, Hermann Göring, suggested that the Führer might adopt a more cautious approach, but Hitler responded that he had always gone for broke: "I have played *va banque* all my life", he said.

The generals presented the *Fall Weiss* strategy on 15th June 1939. The plan was straightforward: Army Group North comprising two armies would attack the



# Poles caught in deadly crossfire

Poland had Europe's fourth largest army in 1939, but its equipment was outdated and relatively few soldiers had been mobilised when the Germans invaded. A difficult situation became impossible when the Soviet Union also attacked from the east.

## 2 Hitler goes to the front

**4th September:** the campaign begins smoothly with the advance guard penetrating far into the country. By 4th September, Hitler is visiting areas close to the front.

*Hitler felt safe enough to visit units near the front.*



## 1 Germany crosses border

**1st September:** German troops invade Poland from the north (East Prussia), west (Germany) and south (Slovakia). The army makes gains everywhere despite a number of significant losses.

## 6 Germans celebrate victory

**6th October:** when the battle of Kock ends, the last Polish forces surrender. Poland is fully occupied by the Soviet Union and Germany. On 5th October, the Germans hold a victory parade in Warsaw.

## 5 Capital is forced to surrender

**27th September:** Warsaw falls. After intense bombing by aircraft and artillery, the Polish capital surrenders. Much of the city is destroyed, and around 25,000 civilians have been killed.

*The relentless shelling of Warsaw eventually forced the city into submission.*



## 3 Poles hit back

**9th September:** the Polish Army counterattacks by the River Bzura. It enjoys initial success before the Germans bring in reinforcements, winning the battle just 10 days later.



## 4 Soviets invade from the east

**17th September:** following their agreement with Germany, the Soviets invade Eastern Poland. A war on two fronts is too much for the Poles and the Soviets advance quickly and easily.

*About 60 German divisions took part in the campaign against Poland, and the panzer units in particular enjoyed easy successes on the flat terrain.*



northern part of Poland, while Army Group South's three armies would invade from the south. But there was still one unresolved question: how would the Soviet Union react to its neighbour being invaded by Germany?

Joseph Stalin had watched Hitler's manoeuvring in Europe with great interest. The Soviet dictator harboured his own territorial ambitions, including the subjugation of the Baltic nations, parts of Finland, Bessarabia (an area spanning parts of modern-day Moldova and Ukraine) and Eastern Poland. The territories had belonged to the Russian Tsarist Empire and Stalin considered them to be a part of the Soviet Union.

The solution to both nations' desire for enlargement came through a mutual agreement. On 23rd August, German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop boarded a flight to Moscow. Early the next day, von Ribbentrop and his Soviet colleague Vyacheslav Molotov signed the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. The two countries pledged neutrality in case of war with a third party. But the pact also included a secret protocol that allowed Eastern Europe to be divided according to Soviet and German interests. Germany's included Western Poland, while the Soviets claimed Finland and Eastern Poland. The agreement gave Germany a free hand to occupy half of Poland without provoking the Soviet Union, while Stalin could subdue the old Russian territories.

With the agreement in place, Hitler was ready to launch his campaign in the East, and on 25th August 1939, German troops were ordered to launch their attack the following day. But at the last minute, the Führer hesitated and rescinded the order. However, the message did not reach all sections, and several Wehrmacht units made small inroads into Polish territory. The Polish military ordered a full, if hasty, mobilisation of its forces in response on 31st August.

Hitler's hesitation was due in part to Chamberlain's promise, made on 24th August, that Britain would offer military support in the event of a German attack on Poland. But the delay also gave the dictator the opportunity to secure a



## VYACHESLAV MOLOTOV

NAME

TITLE | POLITICIAN AND DIPLOMAT

1890-1986

### Soviet politician was demoted

Molotov was one of Stalin's closest allies, and was trusted with signing the non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union in August 1939 that led to the invasion of Poland. Molotov held several prominent positions, but later fell out of favour and was demoted to Ambassador of Mongolia in 1957.

- Secretary of the Central Committee.
- Foreign Minister 1939-49, 1953-56.

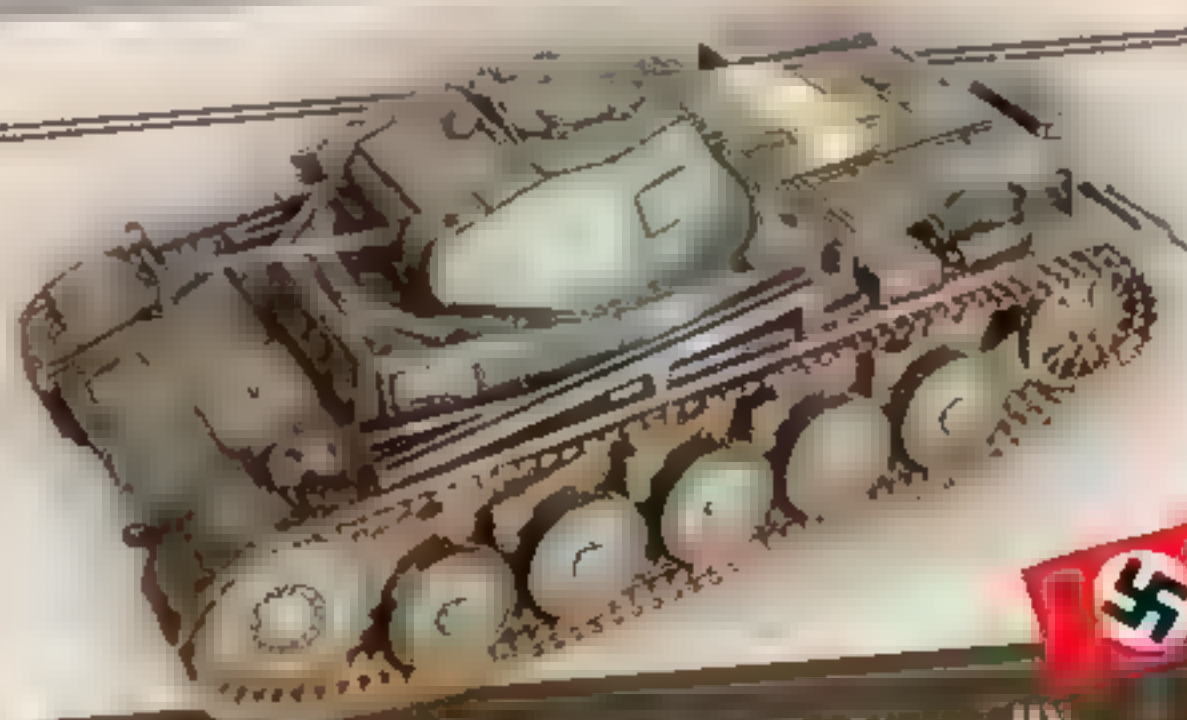


pretext for his attack. If Hitler could claim that the Poles had struck first, it would be a useful weapon in a war of propaganda.

### FARMER BECAME THE WAR'S FIRST VICTIM

On the evening of 31st August, 27-year-old SS-Sturmbannführer Alfred Helmut Naujocks, together with a small handful of SS soldiers disguised as Poles, reached the radio transmitter in Gleiwitz (now Gliwice), a small town in what was then German territory, near the Polish border. The SS soldiers had no trouble penetrating the building where the radio transmitter was located. The concierge had left his post and the two police officers who normally guarded the transmitter had been hoodwinked into being elsewhere. In the transmitter room itself, the soldiers attacked four men and led them down to the basement. Then the SS soldiers

broadcast a radio message, partly in Polish: "Achtung, achtung! This is Gleiwitz. The radio station is in Polish hands". The spokesman referred to himself as a Polish



**PzKpfw II (Panzerkampfwagen II)**

Weight	8.9 tonnes
Crew	3 men
Main weapon	20-mm gun
Top speed	40 km/h
Armour	5-14 mm
Number in 1939	1,223

#### GUN SMASHED THROUGH ARMOUR

PzKpfw II was armed with a 20-mm gun, which could penetrate the armour of all contemporary Polish tanks. PzKpfw II was a big improvement over its predecessor, which had only two machine guns. The Germans organised the tanks into highly efficient special operational units.



**7TP**

Weight	9.9 tonnes
Crew	3 men
Main weapon	37-mm gun
Top speed	37 km/h
Armour	5-17 mm
Number in 1939	95

#### TANKS WERE OUTNUMBERED

In 1935 the Polish Army ordered its own version of Britain's Vickers tank. The first version, named 7TP, was the best Polish tank in 1939 and was superior to most German tanks. But the Poles didn't have enough of them to make a decisive difference to the war's outcome.





freedom fighter and read an anti-German statement that ended with the words "Long live Poland".

### POLES WENT ON THE DEFENSIVE

The German plan was to surround and then destroy the Polish army as quickly as possible, allowing German troops to be redeployed back home to counter any French offensive.

The Poles' plan, however, was to pursue a dilatory and defensive war to allow the country time to complete its delayed mobilisation and give the French and British an opportunity to attack the Germans from the west.

Unfortunately, not all the Polish units were prepared for a modern war. It was one of few countries to have maintained a large cavalry, which proved to be no match for the German war machine. On the first day of the invasion near Krojanty in the northern part of the country, a Polish cavalry regiment launched an attack on a German infantry unit. Suddenly, armoured vehicles burst out of a nearby forest to attack the regiment. Around 20 riders – including the commander – were killed before the remaining soldiers managed to turn their horses and escape.

Despite mounting fierce opposition, the Polish troops were slowly retreating. German Stuka dive bombers posed a serious threat to both ground forces and civilians who fled in their thousands. From the beginning of the invasion, the Luftwaffe terrorised towns and villages. The idea was to wear down the resistance of the Polish people so that the country would be forced to surrender. In the 40 days it took to subjugate Poland, more than 150,000 civilians were killed.

Despite the catastrophic situation, many Poles still clung to the hope of help arriving from Britain and France. On the evening of 1st September, their prayers seemed to be answered: the British demanded that Germany cease its hostilities against Poland and immediately withdraw their

troops. But the British set no time limit. The French for their part put off making a formal declaration of war for two to three days to give the French reserve forces time to move into position. After consulting with the French prime minister, Chamberlain decided to issue a final ultimatum to the Germans on 2nd September. The notice was to be conveyed by the British ambassador in Berlin, Neville Henderson, to Germany's foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop the following morning.

### THE FÜHRER FROZE

A little before 09.00, Henderson arrived at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, von Ribbentrop did not want to meet the ambassador. Instead, he left his interpreter, Paul Schmidt, to meet with Henderson while he was driven to the Reich Chancellery. Schmidt and Henderson stood awkwardly facing one another in the foreign secretary's office as the British ambassador read out the ultimatum: "If His Majesty's Government has not received satisfactory assurances of the cessation of all aggressive action against Poland, and the withdrawal of German troops from that country, by 11 o'clock British Summer Time, from that time a state of war will exist between Great Britain and Germany."

Schmidt put the ultimatum in his bag and hurried to the Reich Chancellery, where he related the British terms to von Ribbentrop and

Hitler, who was seated behind his desk.

"When I finished there was complete silence. Hitler sat immobile, gazing before him," the interpreter later recounted. After a while, Hitler turned towards the foreign minister with a furious look and asked in a tone that suggested he had been ill-advised: "What now?"

Von Ribbentrop replied, "I assume that the French will hand in a similar ultimatum within the hour." Only 20 minutes after the expiry of the deadline, Berlin rejected



*The Infantry Assault Badge was given to Waffen-SS and Wehrmacht soldiers after the campaign against Poland.*



Britain's demands. But by then the British government had already declared war on Germany. Almost six hours later, the French declaration that von Ribbentrop predicted arrived.

That same evening, the German dictator, worrying about a great European war that he had hoped to avoid, boarded his private armoured train to visit the front in Poland. Before the train departed, however, Hitler confided to his trusted propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, that he still believed that Britain and France would only conduct a *kartfferelkreig* (potato war): an economic blockade, rather than all-out war.

### GERMAN PINCERS SNAPPED SHUT

Things seemed to be going to plan for Hitler's troops in Poland. The Wehrmacht had already taken several towns and, in the south-west of Poland, German tanks crossed the River Warta. Despite declaring war, the British and French governments seemed reluctant to intervene.

On 6th September, the Germans captured Krakow, and on the same day the British Military Mission in Poland sent an ominous report to London stating that "the two most dangerous [German] attacks at present are those of the motorised groups from Silesia and the forces moving southwards on Warsaw from East Prussia. Should these two arms of the pincers succeed in effecting a junction, a large portion of the old Polish Army might be surrounded". The situation was dire for the Poles, and their commanders urgently needed to find an effective response to the German offensive.

The Polish army's answer came on 9th September, when a counteroffensive led by General Tadeusz Kutrzeba was launched at the Bzura River just over 100 kilometres west of Warsaw. The general's aim was to interrupt the Germans' advance towards the Polish capital and at the same time recapture the towns of Leczyca and Piatek further south. In

the beginning, Kutrzeba benefitted from a tailwind, because the Germans underestimated the size of the Polish forces. The Poles entered Leczyca, where fierce house-to-house fighting took place, then after several attempts, they also succeeded in taking Piatek.

A German company, which was defending one of the approach roads to the city, came under heavy shelling and sought cover in trenches left over from World War I. The company commander, Captain Christian Kinder, subsequently wrote about the incident in his book *Männer der Nordmark an der Bzura*.

"In intervals of three to five minutes, hand and rifle grenades landed in the company's trenches. This section was methodically and with surprising accuracy from the right to the left bombarded... Two men very near to the Company were riddled with fine fragments and were killed immediately... each man now literally felt the moment come when the next hand grenade would strike him."

Christian Kinder was one of the few men from the

*After the war, von Ribbentrop was convicted of crimes against humanity and hanged.*

1893-1946



NAME

**JOACHIM VON RIBBENTROP**

TITLE

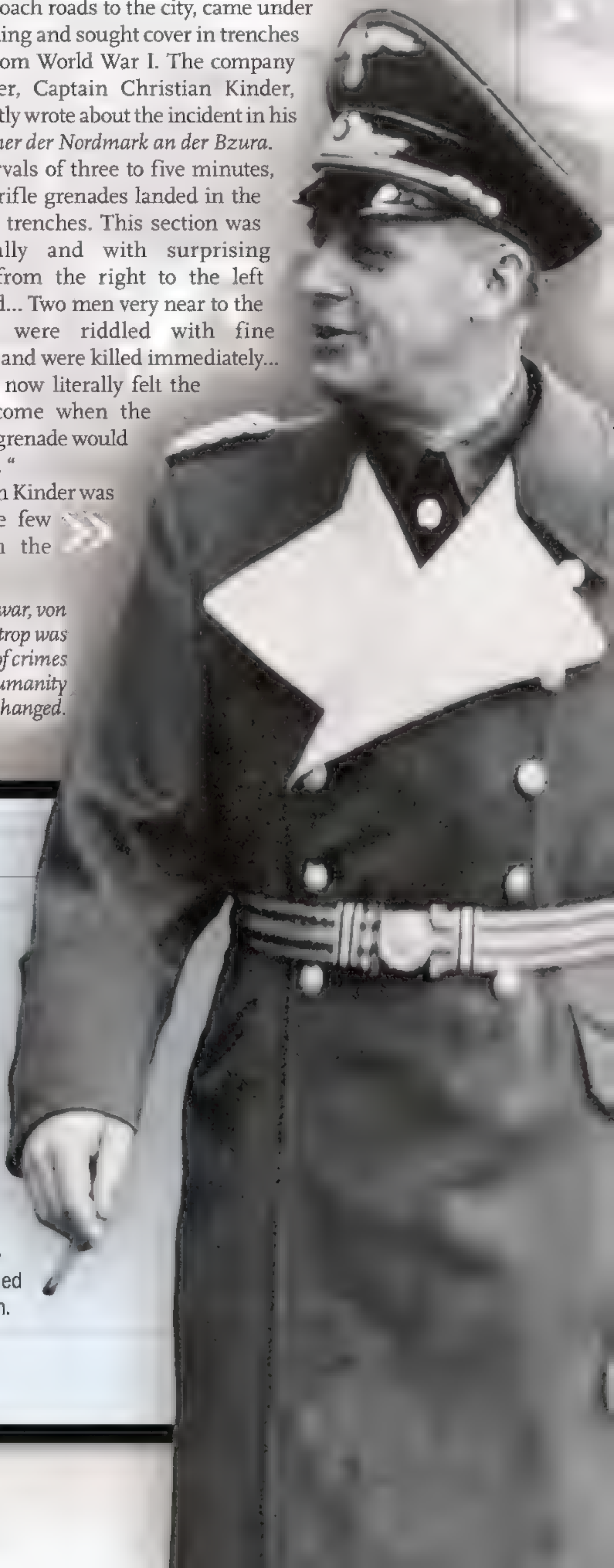
FOREIGN MINISTER

## Top Nazi pursued Jews throughout Europe

As a well-travelled businessman Joachim von Ribbentrop had a better knowledge of world politics than most senior Nazis. Following his enrolment in the Nazi Party in 1932, he dreamed of a career as Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs. Hitler first sent von Ribbentrop to London as an ambassador, but in 1938 his dream came true when he succeeded Konstantin von Neurath as head at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Von Ribbentrop's proudest moment came in 1939 when, along with his Soviet colleague Molotov, he signed a non-aggression pact between the two countries. Elsewhere, his role included helping to exterminate Jews in occupied countries, which was principally the reason for his later war crimes conviction.

- German Foreign Minister 1938-45.
- Stood trial at Nuremberg and was executed in 1946.





Nine-year-old Ryszard Pajewski sits in the ruins of what was once his home in Warsaw.



company to survive the fighting. The following day, two German infantry divisions withdrew in chaos. One of the divisions reported to headquarters that the situation was “exceptionally serious” and urged it to send reinforcements. Captain Kinder noted that some of his men, “shaken by the superior power of the enemy, were beginning to be resigned”.

The German soldiers’ fighting spirit was further weakened when Polish cavalry attacked them from the rear.

#### POLES LOST COMMUNICATIONS

Shortly after, German High Command reacted by reorganising its forces. At the same time, Polish troops ran into trouble. The units had no air support, and in some places even had to advance without cover from artillery or proper communication, partly because their phone lines had been destroyed. Yet the Poles managed to advance for two days before the Germans beat them back during an attack on 11th

September, where they recaptured several kilometres of territory. The following day, the German forces – which now possessed four times as many tanks as the Poles – were on the front foot once more.

#### 560 tonnes

of explosives and 70 tonnes of firebombs were dropped by the Luftwaffe over Warsaw during the final days of the campaign, turning the city into an inferno.

Now it was Kutrzeba’s turn to regroup, which gave the Germans time to bring up reinforcements. On 16th September, a German armoured corps attacked from the east, and an armoured division broke through a Polish infantry division’s line of defence. Kutrzeba’s forces were surrounded and the Luftwaffe relentlessly attacked the encircled Polish troops.

Polish cavalryman Klemens Rudnicki was one of the lucky ones who escaped the pocket. But his fleeing unit was ambushed and surrounded by German forces in a nearby forested area. The Polish cavalry dismounted and fought on the ground: “bullets buzzed like wasps; the artillery began to respond; it was quite impossible to emerge from the forest”,



Rudnicki wrote later. Only after dark did the Polish cavalry succeed in escaping.

By 21st September, the Battle of Bzura was over. Two Polish armies were shattered, and 100,000 soldiers were either dead or in German captivity. The road to Warsaw was now open for the German main force to join the foremost panzer units, which had reached the city walls on 7th September.

Over the following days, a trinity of tanks, artillery and aircraft bombarded the Polish capital. A Polish officer who participated in the defence of the Warsaw district of Praga described the attacks on 10th September in his diary: "The nerves of the people are still frayed from yesterday's shelling. All about us buildings lie in ruins. The fire at the Transfiguration hospital with its several hundred wounded was a ghastly business. I saw a soldier with both legs amputated crawling from the building on his elbows; other wounded jumped out of the windows on the pavement. Five doctors and several nurses perished in the fire."

By mid-September, Warsaw was completely surrounded. The Germans demanded that the capital surrender, but the commander of the city's defence stubbornly refused.

### DOOMED CITY WOULD NOT GIVE UP

By the end of September 1939, the city had a post-apocalyptic air. The bodies of people and horses filled the streets, much of the city lay in ruins, and water pipes, electricity, hospitals and railway stations were smashed. The survivors were starving, drinking water was running out and doctors warned of the risk of disease.

The situation in Warsaw stemmed from Hitler's dissatisfaction that the city had not yet surrendered. As the city continued to hold out, the impatient Führer ordered the Luftwaffe to carry out a relentless bombing campaign. On 25th September, 1,200 aircraft attacked the city. The crews bombed both the capital's industrial estates and residential areas. The following day, the artillery arrived to join in the shelling, while the infantry stormed the condemned city as it burned.

Finally, on 27th September Warsaw gave up the struggle. 30,000 people had been killed in the inferno, but there was more bad news for the beleaguered Poles: on 17th September, Stalin's Red Army had crossed Poland's eastern border, and by the time Warsaw surrendered, the Soviet forces were already at the line agreed by Ribbentrop and Molotov. Stalin and Hitler were well on their way to wiping the democratic Polish nation off the map.

The Polish government had already fled to Romania and on 6th October, the last Polish forces surrendered. The Polish army had suffered a loss of 70,000 dead and 133,000 wounded in the war against the Germans, while another 50,000 had fallen in the fighting with the Red Army. In comparison, the Germans reported losses of just 11,000 dead and 30,000 people wounded.

So far, Hitler was winning his high-stakes game: he had captured Western Poland without Britain or France having actively intervened. But now that the two countries had declared war, there were new players at the table and the endgame was far from certain.

# Polish army was exiled

Poland's defeat marked the end of Poland's army. Many soldiers fled when the country surrendered, but later played an important role in the war.

Although Hitler's troops surrounded large parts of the Polish army, many soldiers and pilots managed to escape. Almost 100,000 men crossed the border into Romania, which was still neutral at that time. The vast majority went on to France, where 75,000 Polish soldiers participated in the fight against Nazi Germany in 1940. When France also fell, the Poles fled to Britain. If you include Polish deserters forced to fight in the German army, the number of Poles fighting in exile during the war was around 250,000.

During the Battle of Britain in 1940, Polish pilots played a particularly vital role. Although the Poles only made up five percent of the pilots in the Royal Air Force, they accounted for 12 percent of the RAF's victories in the battle. Of the 1,736 aircraft the Germans lost, 203 were shot down by Polish pilots.


A significant part of the Polish fleet also escaped. Many of the ships reached Britain and took part in the sinking of the great German Battleship *Bismarck* in May 1941.

*Many Poles received medals for their efforts on the Western Front.*



*Polish fighter pilots had their own squadron based in England.*



The background is a dark, moody night scene of a city skyline. A large, glowing yellow '1939' is prominently displayed in the foreground, partially obscuring the city view. The city lights are visible in the distance, and the overall tone is dark and atmospheric.

1939

13<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER



# U-BOAT SNEAKS INTO BRITISH NAVAL BASE

World War II is only one month old when the Germans make their first strike on Britain. On 13th October 1939, a German submarine slides into the heavily guarded British military port Scapa Flow on the Orkney Islands and fires seven torpedoes at the battleship *HMS Royal Oak*.

*The crew on HMS Royal Oak were sleeping peacefully in their bunks when the torpedoes hit. Within a few minutes there was burning chaos.*



## THE STAGE IS SET

War breaks out in September 1939, but at the old base of Scapa Flow on the Orkney Islands the British feel safe. The base is almost impregnable, protected by sunken ships, submarine nets and an unpredictable tide. But the enemy has found a hole in the defences and outside the base, a German submarine lurks on the sea floor.



**T**HERE WAS A CHILL IN THE AIR ON the evening of 13th October 1939. Everything was quiet aboard the battleship HMS *Royal Oak*, which was anchored at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands, one of Britain's safest and most closely guarded ports.

Sunken naval vessels blocked the entrances to the harbour and between these blockships were submarine nets, meaning that the crew of the almost 200-metre-long *Royal Oak* could sleep soundly – despite the fact that Britain had just declared war on Germany following Hitler's invasion of Poland the previous month.

Suddenly, a series of massive explosions filled the air with a deafening roar. Flames shot outwards from the *Royal Oak* and a huge column of water spurted up from beside the battleship's hull. Pieces of mast, chimneys and the command bridge were flung into the air along with a number of unfortunate crew members. Several were blasted skywards, already dead before they landed in the oil-coated sea. The cries

of burning sailors competed with shouts for help from those who were already drowning in the oil-slicked waves.

The old British warship had been hit hard and now she was sinking fast. Precious minutes were lost before the British discovered what had happened.

Against all odds, an enemy U-boat

### 30 merchant

ships from eight different countries were sunk by the German submarine U-47. Among them were four Norwegians, one Swedish and one Danish.

had stolen into the naval harbour, fired a deadly salvo of torpedoes and was already on her way back through the shallow Kirk Sound, despite the four blockships that supposedly obstructed the exit.

The fleet commanders had been so sure that no vessel could penetrate the Kirk Sound with its shallow waters and erratic tides that they had neither mined it nor stretched any submarine nets between the blockships.

### MINEFIELDS PROTECTED FLEET

Anti-submarine nets were part of the standard defences used in many Royal Navy bases where warships docked for repair or supplies. One of the oldest and best-guarded was Scapa Flow. It had been in use since the Viking age and formed a natural harbour with a bay protected by several surrounding inlets and islets.

The harbour was located in the heart of the Orkney Islands just off the north coast of Scotland, and had been reinforced during World War I with mines, submarine nets and blockships. Among the sunken ships were several German vessels from WWI, which had been detained in Scapa Flow and later sunk.

The sinking of proud Kriegsmarine warships was not the only humiliation that the Germans experienced in connection with Scapa Flow. Twice during WWI, Germany had attempted to attack British ships in the guarded natural harbour, but both missions had failed.

The first attack came in November 1914, when the submarine U-18 was hit and sunk by a trawler. The second was in October 1918, when UB-116 was discovered using hydrophones and destroyed with a remote controlled mine. The German desire to hit the British fleet in Scapa Flow was not therefore motivated purely by strategy: a successful attack also have great symbolic value for the Nazi regime.

### ADMIRAL FOUND A HOLE IN THE DEFENCE

The plan for the attack on Scapa Flow had originated at the top of Kriegsmarine command when Rear Admiral Karl Dönitz, who commanded Germany's submarine operations, discovered a gap in the base's defences.

Dönitz realised that the British had failed to deploy any submarine nets in the eastern stretch of Kirk Sound, and that only four major blockships protected the deepest water in the strait. A narrow, low-tide passage in the

*HMS Royal Oak had earned her place in the British fleet in 1914, but gradually she became too slow for modern war.*





# U-47 gets into Scapa Flow

Access to Scapa Flow was blocked by scuttled ships, but the strong tides in Kirk Sound helped *U-47* enter the harbour, where two British battleships – HMS *Royal Oak* and HMS *Pegasus* – lay at anchor.



The commanding officer on the submarine was Captain Günther Prien.

## WELL-PROTECTED BASE

ORKNEY ISLANDS

SCAPA FLOW

NORTH SEA

SCOTLAND

→ *U-47's route*

### 3 Second attack 01.21

Four torpedoes are fired. *Royal Oak* is hit twice and the ship quickly sinks.

### 2 First attack 01.16

Captain Prien fires three torpedoes. One of them hits *Royal Oak's* anchor chain.

### 1 Entry 23.21

The rising tide helps lift *U-47* over the blockships to enter Kirk Sound.

### 4 Exit 01.28

Pursued by several ships, *U-47* flees via a slightly different route.

MAINLAND

ST. MARY'S

Blockships

KIRK SOUND

LAMPS HOLM

HOLM SOUND

Blockships

GLIMPS HOLM

BURRAY

NORTH SEA

SOUTH RONALDSAY

*U-47* had an operating range of 15,170 kilometres and could easily sail to the base off Scotland's north coast and back to Germany without refuelling.





1908-1941

NAME

**GÜNTHER PRIEN**

TITLE

| U-BOAT CAPTAIN

## Jobless to people's hero

Günther Prien's childhood was characterised by poverty. He was raised in Leipzig by his mother, who made her living by making lace. At 15 years of age, Prien joined the German merchant navy and became a deckhand on a freight ship. Everyday life was hard, with frequent fighting and lousy wages, but the young man endured his term and gradually battled his way through the hierarchy to graduate as a naval officer.

But no one would hire him. The bitterness of broken dreams led Prien to join the Nazi party. In 1933, when Germany started to rebuild its fleet, Prien grabbed the chance to work in the Kriegsmarine. After starting as a sailor, he once again rose quickly through the ranks, ending up as a submarine captain.

The mission to Scapa Flow made Prien a national figure, and he quickly became known as one of Germany's submarine heroes. But his fame was brief. On her 10th patrol in 1941, his submarine *U-47* was destroyed by depth charges dropped by the British destroyer *HMS Wolverine* and the entire crew perished.

➤ Graduated from naval school in 1932.

➤ Received his first submarine command in 1938.



northernmost part of the entrance also remained open. To the south, a 170-metre-wide, eight-metre-deep channel offered a navigable channel that a German submarine could use to squeeze into Scapa Flow. Even better, the coastline there was virtually uninhabited.

Dönitz believed that Scapa Flow could be penetrated through Kirk Sound at high tide when the water in the channel would be at its deepest.

All he needed was a suitable man for the operation. The admiral turned his gaze on Captain Günther Prien. In the month since the war broke out, Prien had sunk three British merchant ships. Dönitz recognised him as an ambitious, gifted and bold captain.

The rear admiral offered Prien the mission, but the captain didn't respond immediately. Instead, he spent the night studying all the material he had been given in relation to the task. This included charts and intelligence reports along with photographs and information from air reconnaissance. He also analysed previous assault attempts and considered the possibilities afforded by the weakness Dönitz had discovered, and made a preliminary attack plan. The following morning, the captain accepted the mission.

### TIDE PULLED U-BOAT INTO THE BAY

Prien chose to follow Dönitz's idea of allowing his U-boat, *U-47*, to be pulled into Scapa Flow by the high tide in the shallow Kirk Sound. He planned the mission for 13th October when his vessel would be hidden from the new moon's

minimal light. On 8th October, ammunition and other supplies were loaded, and Prien and his crew secretly departed from Kiel. After four days at sea, the submarine reached the Orkney Islands on 12th October. At 04.00 the next morning, the captain took the U-boat to the seabed beside Scapa Flow.

Only then did he gather the crew and brief them on the mission. They were ordered to lie down and rest in order to save precious oxygen while *U-47* was submerged. The men wrapped their boots in rags, because the British monitors in Scapa Flow were so efficient that even a small kick against the hull's steel plates would be heard on the surface.

### 833 men

out of 1,223 on board *HMS Royal Oak* were killed when the Germans sank the battleship. The attack led to greatly improved security in British sea ports.

### NORTHERN LIGHTS POSED POTENTIAL PROBLEM

In the evening the men had their last meal. After demolishing the pork chops and green cabbage, the crew quietly cleaned up and made ready for battle. Finally, at 19.00 Prien gave orders to head to the pumps. The submarine rose through the water before her periscope was deployed to scan the horizon.

The night was dark and the sea empty. Assured that no enemies were nearby, Prien brought *U-47* to the surface and started her diesel engines. The submarine slowly began to slide towards the coast, but suddenly a clear light spread across the horizon. An amazing Northern Lights display had lit up the sky over the North Sea, but *U-47*'s crew didn't appreciate its beauty – darkness was crucial for their impending attack. Prien briefly considered postponing the mission for a day, but his men were ready so he took a chance



rather than waiting out another 24 hours on the seabed. Bathed in the glow of nature's own light show, the German submarine slowly slipped into Holm Sound – the easternmost entrance to Scapa Flow. Each time the silhouette of a ship appeared in the distance, *U-47* dived beneath the surface.

The many dives up and down tested the patience of both captain and crew. At the same time, the turning tide in the Orkney Islands made conditions erratic and unpredictable.

Close to Kirk Sound, things nearly went horribly wrong. Prien had just 15 meters to spare when he passed the blockship *Soriano*, but the tide suddenly forced the submarine against the sunken ship – just as the captain spotted an anchor chain in front of them. The order for full astern was given, but too late. With a screaming sound, the hull hit the seabed and the submarine became stuck.

Prien ordered the helm hard to port, and in one movement the U-boat freed herself, slammed around the anchor chain and continued to move forward. *U-47* was in Scapa Flow. Through the periscope, the captain searched the horizon, but there was not a single enemy ship in sight.

### BRITISH SHIPS HAD BEEN LURED AWAY

The lack of British targets could be explained by an error in the Germans' intelligence. A week earlier, most of the fleet's strength in Scapa Flow had been at sea, where the ships had been attacked by Luftwaffe. The attack had failed, but fear of a repeat attempt made the Royal Navy relocate to Loch Ewe in Western Scotland instead of heading back to Scapa Flow.

This information had not been passed on to Prien. Still unaware of the reason for the fleet's disappearance, the captain decided to search the bay more thoroughly and sailed further westward. Half an hour after midnight he caught sight of a ship belonging to the Coast Guard, but the small vessel did not meet his criteria of an important military target worth attacking.

Prien turned the submarine around to head back east before ordering a course north along the coast of

U-47 LOGBOOK

## U-BOAT DIVED TO AVOID BRITISH DEPTH-CHARGES

### 8th October

**11.00:** Departs from Kiel through the Kiel Canal.

### 9th October

Passes the day immersed south of Dogger Bank.

### 10th October

Spends daylight hours submerged north of Dogger Bank.

### 13th October

**04.37:** Remains static while the crew rests. Position is 90 metres deep, east of Scapa Flow.

**23.31:** Rises to the surface and in Holm Sound. Briefly runs aground in Kirk Sound. Continues into Scapa Flow.

### 14th October

**0.55:** Turns up the coast and spots the battleships HMS *Royal Oak* and HMS *Pegasus* at an estimated distance of three kilometres.

**01.16:** Fires three torpedoes.

**01.21:** Fires four more torpedoes. Two are full hits.

**01.28:** Both engines are set to full power. *U47* exits Kirk Sound via the southern channel, because the countercurrent and shallow water makes the northern route impassable.

**02.15:** Sails into open waters on south-eastern course back towards base. British ships follow.

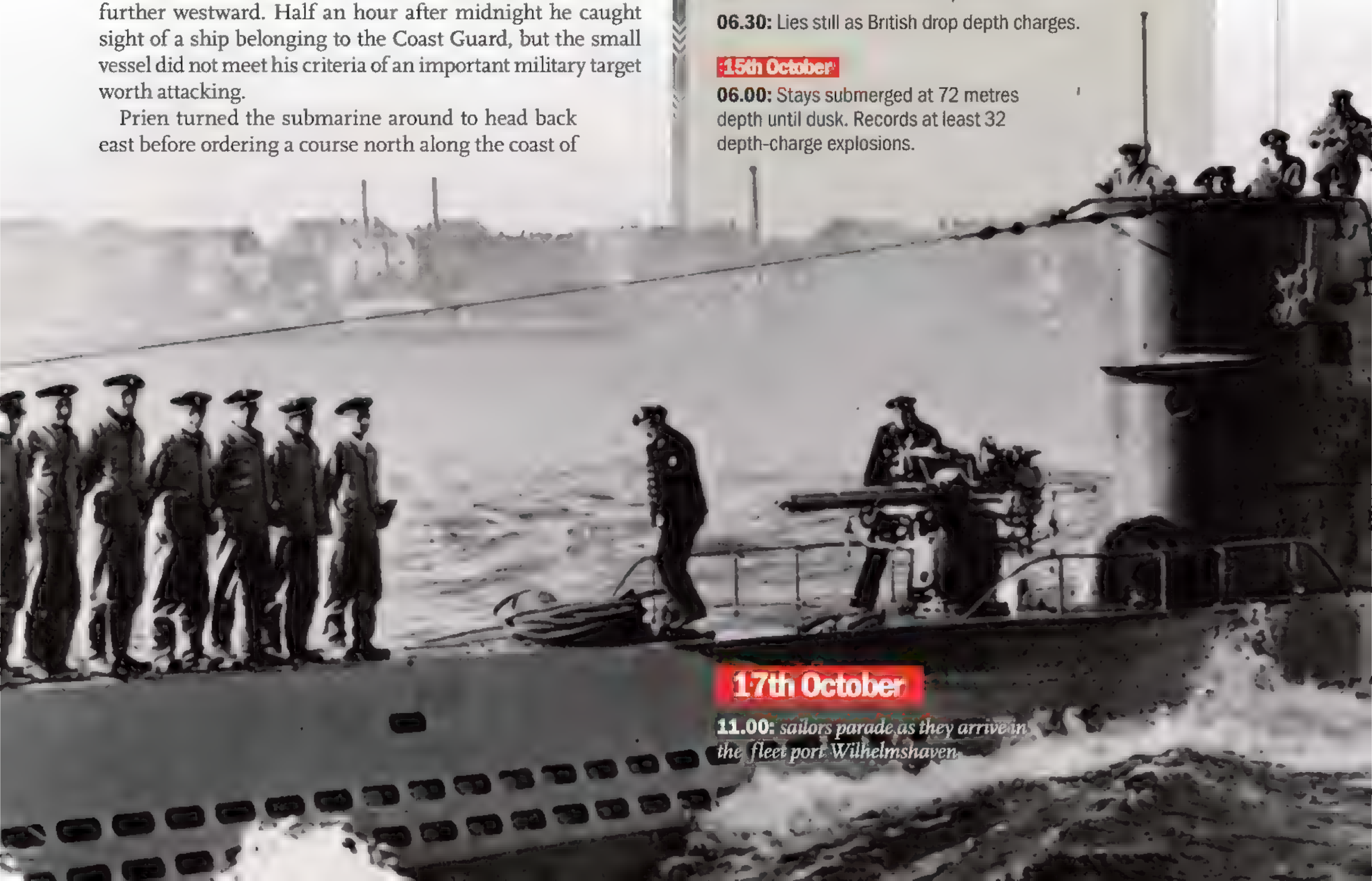
**06.30:** Lies still as British drop depth charges.

### 15th October

**06.00:** Stays submerged at 72 metres depth until dusk. Records at least 32 depth-charge explosions.

### 17th October

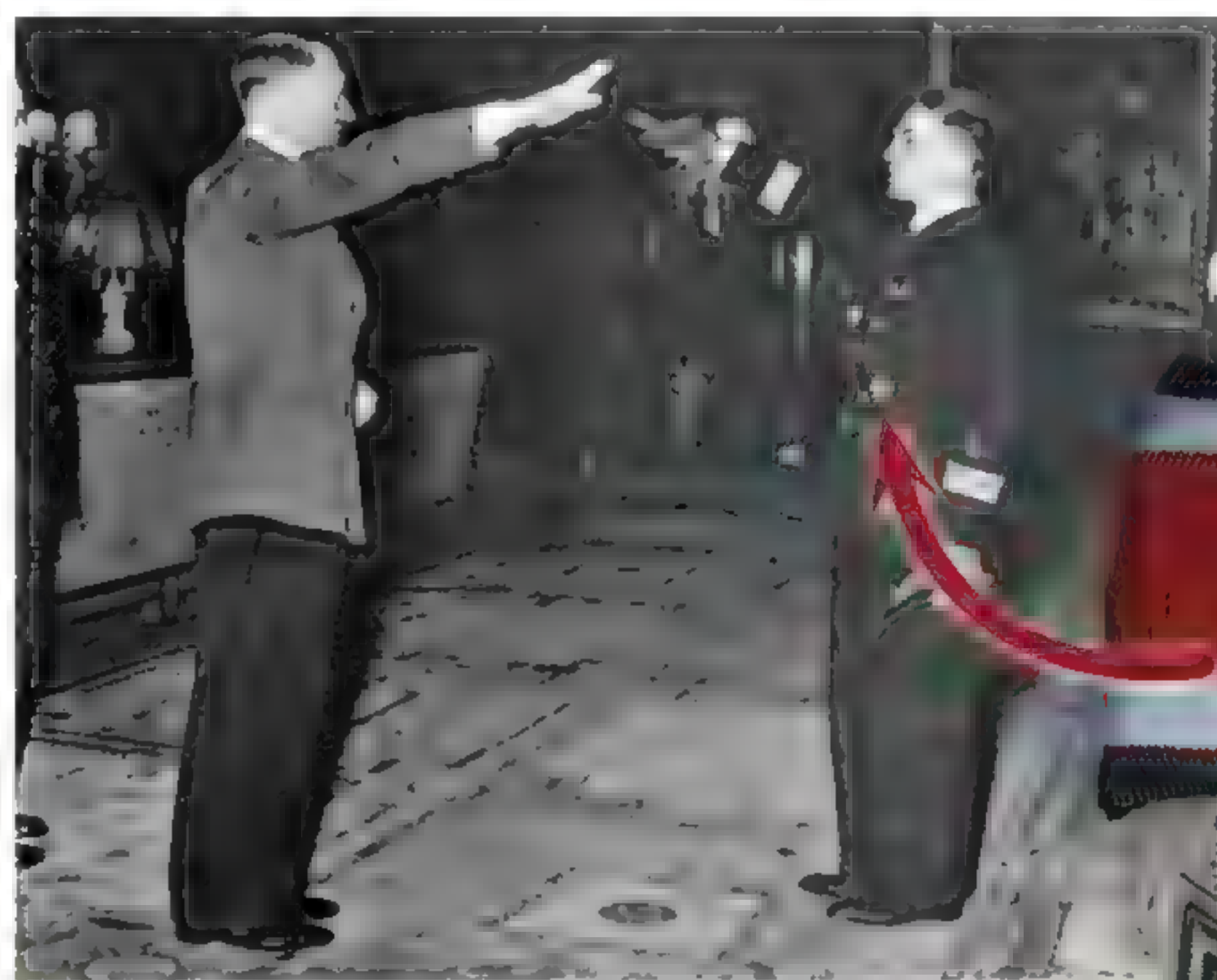
**11.00:** sailors parade as they arrive in the fleet port Wilhelmshaven







After the trip, U-47 returned to Wilhelmshaven, where the crew was greeted with kisses and flowers.



Adolf Hitler personally awarded Iron Cross medals to U-47's crew members.

the mainland. Here he finally found suitable prey. In U-47's periscope two battleships appeared, and he dropped anchor around three kilometres away. Further in side the harbour were several destroyers, but Prien quickly decided to go for the big ships.

At 01.15, the crew of U-47 loaded four torpedoes into the sub's tubes. Two were aimed at the southernmost ship on the horizon, HMS *Royal Oak*, while the other two were intended for HMS *Pegasus* further north. With a slight tremor, three torpedoes were successfully fired, but the last one became stuck in the tube.

After firing, Prien and his men waited anxiously, counting down the seconds as the torpedoes sped towards their destination. Three-and-a-half minutes later the first torpedo struck *Royal Oak's* anchor chain and exploded, while the other two disappeared into the water's darkness.

### TORPEDOES SANK THE BRITISH SHIP

Confusion reigned aboard *Royal Oak*. Nobody dreamed that the battleship had been hit by a German sub. The crew

believed it was only a minor explosion – perhaps one of the ship's own bombs that had gone off by accident.

Prien was undeterred despite the failed attack and ordered another attempt. Five minutes later, all four torpedo tubes were ready for action. This time, two of the torpedoes hit *Royal Oak* in the middle of her hull. With a deafening sound they opened a hole nine metres wide in the ship's side. The battleship's ammunition store was probably hit because the explosion was so powerful that parts of the torn hull were hurled into the water.

The *Royal Oak* was doomed. Water gushed into the hull and the ship began listing to one side. Just 13 minutes after the torpedo had hit, the old warship disappeared into Scapa Flow's dark waters.

Prien ordered his crew to set course to exit the bay. Both engines were powered up, but before the sub could make good its escape, problems arose.

### U-BOAT FLED WITH BRITISH AT ITS HEELS

Prien had spent so long searching for ships in Scapa Flow, the tide had turned and the water depth in Kirk Sound was critically low – in some places it was less than three metres. The strong countercurrent knocked the 66-metre-long sub off course again and again, and Prien realised that U-47 could not get out of the narrow northern passage.

He headed for the wider southerly channel out of Kirk Sound, but the water depth here was even lower than in the north. The sub's speed was lowered to 18 km/h while it edged past the southernmost blockship close to shore.

Only a few centimetres separated U-47 from bumping land on one side and colliding with the blockship on the other.

The helm was pulled over hard and the U-boat narrowly escaped striking hard concrete.

By 02.15, U-47 had reached open sea. It was being followed by British destroyers with exploding depth charges, which forced the U-boat to remain on the surface.

### FÜHRER REWARDED CREW PERSONALLY

Four days later, on 17th October at 11.00, U-47 arrived at the naval base of Wilhelmshaven. The crew was met by Grand Admirals Erich Raeder and Karl Dönitz before travelling on to Berlin, where the Führer awaited.

After an open-top parade through Berlin's streets, Hitler received Captain Prien and his crew for a gala dinner, where all were awarded the Iron Cross. It was Prien's proudest moment, but he quickly returned to Kiel and active service.

The captain had become famous and was widely acclaimed as one of the Kriegsmarine's submarine heroes. He would go on to sink 30 Allied ships before being killed on 7th March 1941. A depth charge from British destroyer HMS *Wolverine* destroyed the U-boat's propeller making it so noisy that the destroyer could track U-47's position. All 45 crew members died in the action that finally sank Günther Prien's vessel.



# The Nazis had the lead underwater

The Treaty of Versailles, signed after World War I, forbade Germany from possessing submarines. But after taking power in 1933, the Nazis immediately started building a large U-boat fleet. It was key to their dominance in Europe.



The U-boat War Badge was given to sailors after two successful missions. It combined an eagle, swastika, submarine and wreath.



## Britain had to spread its fleet

According to a 1935 naval agreement, Germany had no more submarines than Britain, but while the British had to distribute their fleet across the world to protect their empire, the Germans could concentrate their U-boats in Europe.

The naval base at Wilhelmshaven in the North Sea was one of the most important to Germany's Kriegsmarine.





*Even with rationing, it was  
often difficult to buy  
particular items because  
they were out of stock*

1939





RATIONING HITS EUROPE

# PETROL & SUGAR ARE WORTH MORE THAN GOLD

With the outbreak of war all international trade comes to a halt, and war-affected countries must learn to survive on local fare alone. Petrol, food, clothing and soap are rationed so that everyone can have access to the limited supplies. In the wake of rationing, black markets develop, where restricted goods are sold at inflated prices.



# PETROL

## Cars vanished from the roads

Rationing in Britain began just two weeks after the war started. From 16th September, the British could not buy fuel without ration coupons and the allocation for private cars was small. The fuel shortage meant that bicycles and horse-drawn vehicles soon became the primary mode of transport in towns and cities. Commercial vehicles were equipped with wood-burning generators.



**Cyclists compete** for space in September 1939 on their way to central London. Petrol and oil were in short supply and reserved for military use. Private vehicles were left parked in garages.

Petrol coupons allowed the purchase of a limited quantity of fuel during a given period.



**At the beginning of the war** citizens of the Third Reich received supplies of food, raw materials and fuel from occupied countries. But scarce resources such as petrol and oil were designated primarily for the war effort. Civilian cars were fitted with generators to allow burning wood to power the engine.







**Coal washed up** on the beach was a welcome addition to frugal fuel rations. The coal came from open coal fields at the bottom of the North Sea and washed ashore during severe weather. After such storms, the British could find coal along the eastern and northern coasts.



**Turn that gas down** – information posters encouraged Brits to save energy wherever possible.



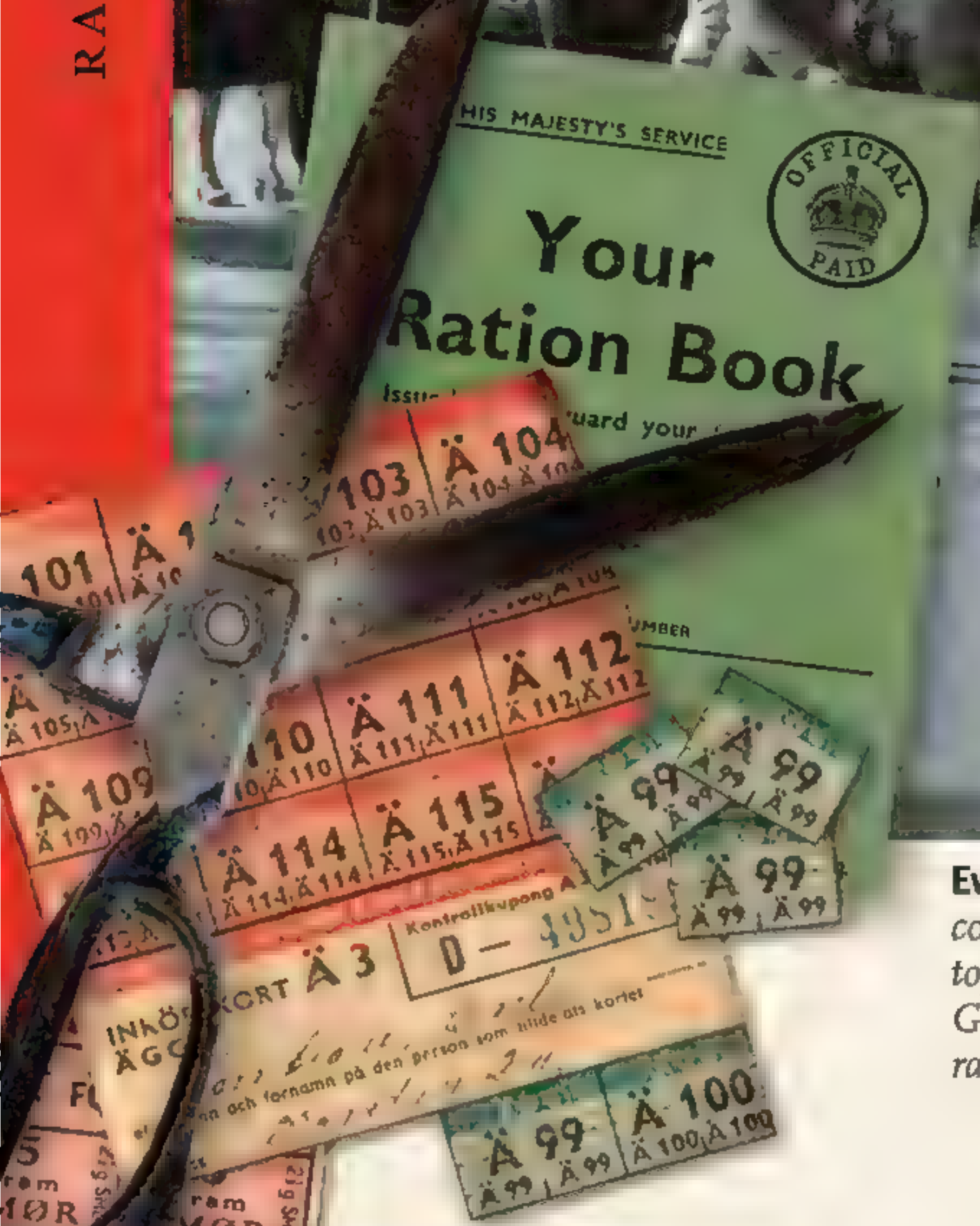
**Locally sourced fuel** such as peat experienced a renaissance. It was hard work digging and drying the peat, and it gave off comparatively little heat.

## FUEL

### Coal and peat replaced oil

The war's severe restrictions on oil and the uncertain supply of gas meant a revival in the use of past fuels. The hunt was on for anything that could be burned. For example, in the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark, people used peat. The peat was dug from bogs by hand at depths of one to two metres and then dried before being used as briquettes in old-fashioned wood-burning stoves. Its fuel value was one third that of birch wood.



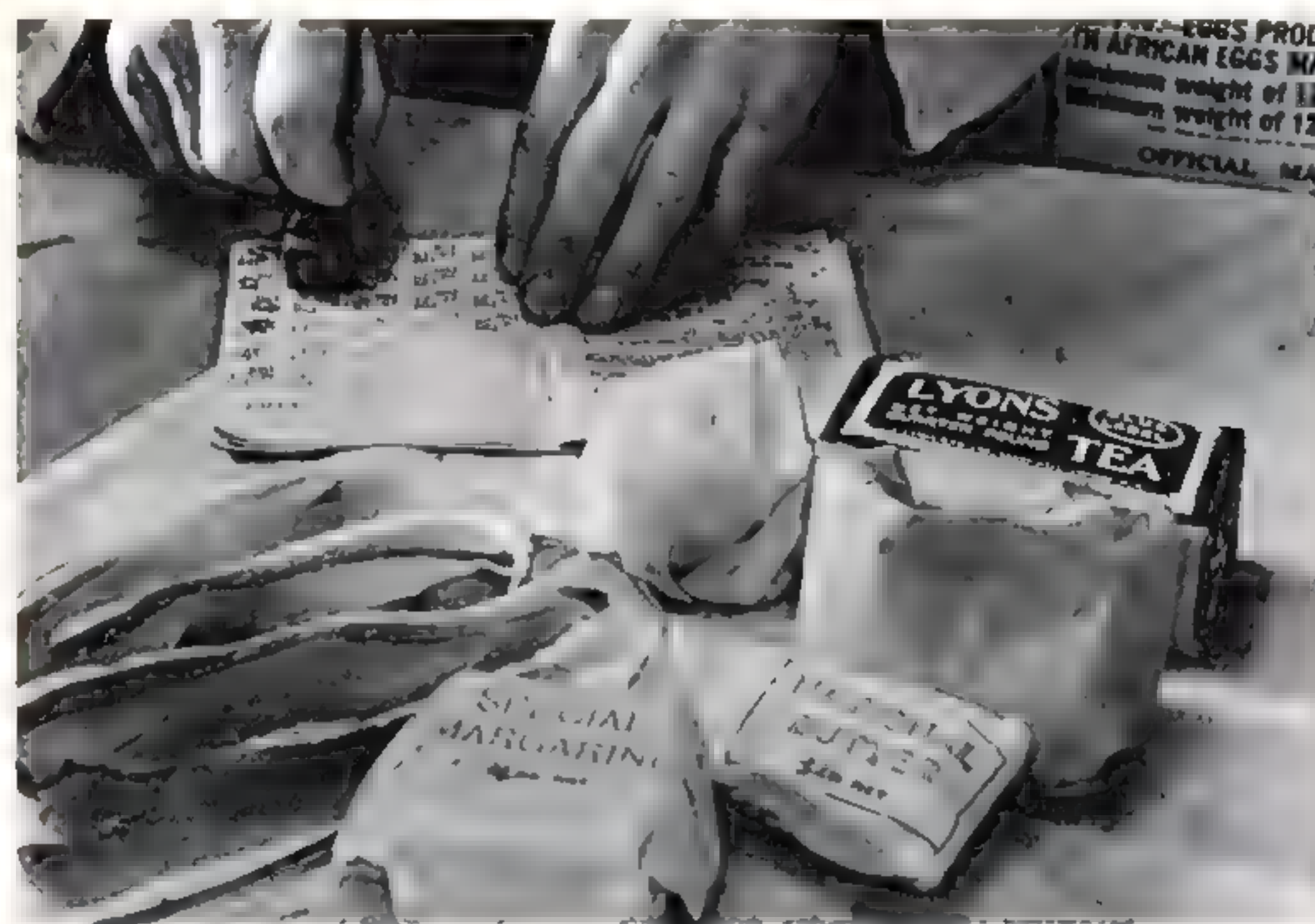


Even in France, wine was rationed. In peacetime, the country produced plenty for both its own consumption and to export, but the war destroyed fields and farms, and workers were conscripted to fight or sent to Germany as forced labourers. Production dropped dramatically, and the Germans seized a large proportion of the remaining output. The rest was distributed through rationing – or offered on the black market.

## SHOPPING

### Everyday groceries

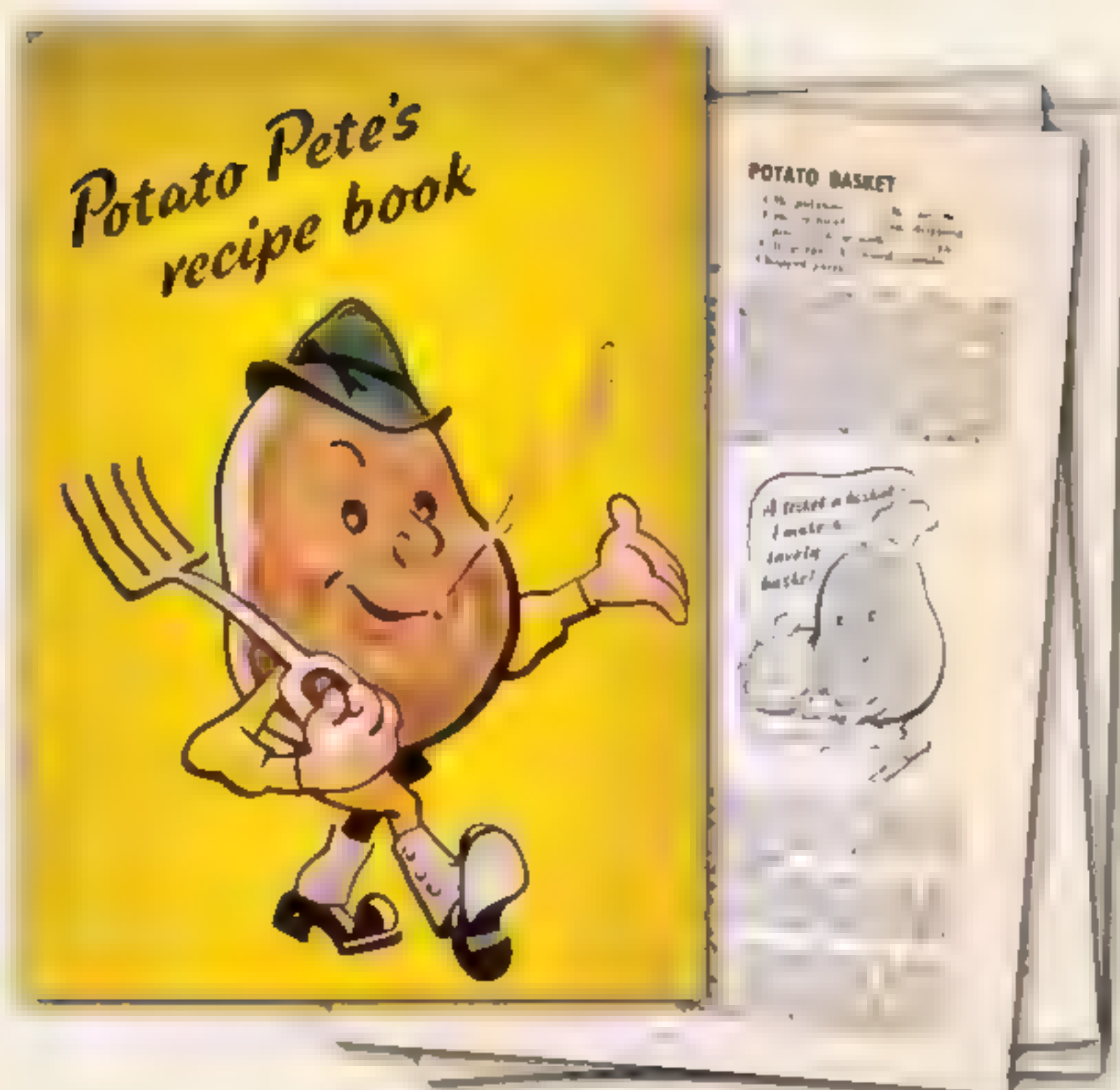
A butter coupon was no guarantee that the shop would have butter. Food supplies were unreliable, and when rumours spread that a store had received new items, housewives immediately queued, hoping to reach the counter before the shelves were empty again. The women in the queue spent time exchanging news about the course of the war or discussing how to stretch their limited rations as far as possible.



In January 1940 bacon, butter and sugar were rationed in the Britain. Soon after, tea and a variety of other basic foods began to be restricted. The British could produce meat and eggs, but not in large quantities.



Potatoes contain vitamin C and are easy to grow. They became the staple that underpinned the British diet during the war.



## COOKING

### Limited diet inspired ingenuity

The lack of variety in war-time foodstuffs placed new demands on cooks. Everyone had to learn to stretch the available ingredients to create meals that were filling, nutritionally sound and that provided enough energy to power the hard physical labour many were forced to engage in. Rationing led to new recipes that often substituted locally produced ingredients, and using leftovers in new ways also became an artform.

### RESEARCHER TESTED ON HERSELF

In 1939, Elsie Widdowson, a dietitian at the University of Cambridge, was asked to find out if the British could live on the food the country was able to produce. It could. She tested herself based on the rations a British adult would have per week (figure in brackets):

■ Bacon and ham *	227 g	** (113 g)
■ Sugar	454 g	(227 g)
■ Tea	113 g	(57 g)
■ Butter	227 g	(57 g)
■ Margarine	340 g	(113 g)
■ Cheese	227 g	(57 g)

(Vegetarians had 85 g extra cheese)



Elsie Widdowson

\* Rations in 1940, \*\* Rations in April 1945



The war diet was monotonous and consisted mostly of starch. This course taught members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force how to get the most out of available raw ingredients, plus how to preserve vitamins and add calcium.





During their holidays, schoolchildren worked in the vegetable gardens that sprang up everywhere to supply the country with food. Every single patch of land was used, including the lawns in London parks, which were dug up and cultivated.



The potato harvest in the autumn of 1939 kept the British fed and healthy through the war's first winter. Growing potatoes was a crucial contribution, and meant that even the elderly could support the war effort.

## HORTICULTURE

### Vegetables replaced grass

It didn't take long for the British government to launch its "Dig for Victory" campaign, which was up and running by the autumn of 1939. The message was for civilians to become self-sufficient and cultivate every available scrap of land. Lawns in city parks, sporting stadiums and private gardens were dug up and sown with rows of potatoes and leeks. Anyone who had any space left over started keeping chickens, pigeons and goats.





Ladies painted their legs brown with a stripe on the back to imitate stockings. Silk and nylon stockings were soon a luxury that could only be obtained on the black market.

## BLACK MARKET


### Soap and stockings were traded illegally

Foreign luxury goods such as nylon stockings from the United States or fragrant soaps from France became rare commodities after the outbreak of war. Instead, Europe's war-torn peoples had to cope with home-cooked soap and thick socks knitted from scratchy recycled wool. Another option was to buy items on the black market, a covert trade network for everything from ration coupons, coffee and sugar to silk stockings. However, it was not without risk. Black-market trading was severely punished in all countries.



After occupation, the price of soap rose by over 650 percent on the black market in Belgium. The Germans looted food and other goods from the country, which were then shipped to Germany or sold back to the Belgians with a hefty markup by German black marketeers.





*Photos of Finnish soldiers wearing masks gave the impression that the Soviets were using gas. The Finns tried to win the sympathy of the outside world because they knew they couldn't win the war without help.*

1939 30<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER





• ❄️ • WINTER WAR IN FINLAND • ❄️ •

# FROST SHATTERS STALIN'S PLANS

Stalin had set aside 12 days for the war. He thought it wouldn't take any longer than that for the Soviet Union to defeat Finland, but he was wrong. The Finnish soldiers fought valiantly against their foes, and the Soviet Union paid dearly for its victory – during 105 days of war, at least 250,000 Soviet soldiers were killed.



## THE STAGE IS SET



It had been a long road to independence. Finland had once belonged to Sweden, but was ceded to Russia in 1809. It finally succeeded in becoming independent in 1917 following the revolution in Russia. Now Stalin is making territorial demands, but the Finns won't give up their hard-won freedom without a fight.



**T**HE PALE MORNING SUN hung low over Helsinki on 30th November 1939. Without warning, nine Soviet bombers emerged from the clouds and began an unscheduled flight over Finland's capital. Above the harbour, one aircraft dropped its payload without hitting a single ship. The planes then continued towards the town centre, probably intending to bomb the main train station, but they missed. All the bombs fell on the central square, killing 40 people.

Straight after, the planes spread out. Some bombed the airport – but only hit a hangar – others attacked the city's technical college, where students and teachers lost their lives. The Soviets flew back and forth dropping their last bombs. A few planes reached a residential neighbourhood, before the aircraft regrouped and disappeared to the east.

Only then did the city's air-raid siren go off. But the noise of the sirens merely confirmed that Finland was at war with its mighty neighbour to the east, the Soviet Union. Four hours later, the Soviets returned with 15 bombers. In total, 91 of Helsinki's inhabitants perished that day.

A car wound its way through the chaos. In the passenger seat was the country's defence chief, Carl Gustaf Emil

Mannerheim. It should have been his last day on the job – he was unhappy with the government, and had sought to leave. Mannerheim wanted a bigger military budget, but was refused. He'd recommended a more lenient policy towards Stalin, but his plan was rejected. Now everyone knew that the Finnish-Swedish aristocrat was the person to save Finland.

**3.7 million**

people lived in Finland in 1939. The small country was up against the Soviet Union, which had a population of around 170 million.

#### DESIRE TO PROTECT LENINGRAD

The conflict with the USSR had been going on for several years, and on 18th October 1939, Josef Stalin had put his demands on the table: Finland must abandon the Karelian Isthmus, destroy its defences to the east, and allow a Soviet naval base on the Hanko Peninsula. This would give the Soviet industrial city of Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) more of a buffer against possible military attacks.

The Finns rejected Stalin's demands and assured him that Leningrad had nothing to fear, because no foreign power would be allowed to use Finnish territory for an attack.

The Finns suspected that Stalin's demands were just the first in a long line that would culminate in their country being swallowed up by the Soviet Union. But in Moscow, Stalin couldn't understand how the little country could be so

confident. He became suspicious and assumed the Finns must have made secret deals with enemies of the Soviet Union. He decided to take the Finnish territories by force.

He appointed Marshal Kirill Meretskov, Leningrad's military commander, as head of the invading army.

#### FINNISH FORCES TO BE SMASHED

On the night of 30th November, all the preparations had been completed. Meretskov commanded his mighty army into battle: "Comrades, soldiers of the Red Army, officers, commissars and political workers! To fulfil the Soviet government's and our great Fatherland's will, I hereby order: the troops in Leningrad Military District are to march over the frontier, crush the Finnish forces, and once and for all secure the Soviet Union's north-western borders and Lenin's city, the crib of the revolution of the proletariat."

Over the 1,000 km border – from the Barents Sea in the north to the Baltic Sea in the south – Meretskov's armies rolled into Finland. He had 500,000 soldiers, three times more than the Finns. Meretskov also had



*On the first day of the Winter War, Helsinki was attacked twice by Soviet bombers – 91 people were killed.*



# Soldiers lacked equipment

The Finnish army didn't have enough clothing and equipment for every soldier when the war broke out in autumn 1939. Many had to bring their own skis and winter gear.

**Fur hat** protected against the cold. The hat had a small rosette emblem.

**Identity tags** ensured that fallen soldiers could always be identified.

**White camouflage** clothing made the snipers almost invisible in the deep snow that lay everywhere.

## Infantry private

**Ammunition** was stored in small containers.

**A bayonet** was carried by some soldiers, while many had to settle for an ordinary knife called a *puukko*.

**Trousers** weren't always provided to mobilised reservists, who had to make do with 'Model Cajander' uniforms, which consisted of their own civilian clothes along with an army-issued utility belt, hat badge and rifle.

**Boots** in the infantry were usually made of black leather.

**Food bags** were handy on a sniper's day-long and often solitary trips.

**Knitted mittens** and wool socks were sent by families to the front.

**Guns** didn't come with scopes as standard, but many snipers took them from fallen Soviets.

## Sniper

**Skis and poles** were in many cases the soldier's own. The vast majority of Finnish men were experienced skiers.

**Ski boots** were for officers only. Most soldiers tended to wear their ordinary black boots.

UNIFORMS





*Reindeer were useful for carrying weapons, and far more reliable than Soviet armoured vehicles.*

30 times as many aircraft and 200 times as many tanks. In fact, he was concerned that the Red Army would advance so quickly that it might forget to stop before it got to Sweden. Over the border, Mannerheim urged his men: "Brave soldiers of Finland! I enter on this task at a time when our hereditary enemy is again attacking our country. Confidence in one's commander is the first condition for success."

Confidence was the only thing he had – as a former officer in the Imperial Russian Army, he knew the art of war, but he lacked just about everything else. Most of the Finns' weapons pre-dated the Russian Revolution in 1917, and they only had enough ammunition to last for a few weeks.

Mannerheim knew that Finland would never be able to win the war. He could only hope to delay the Soviet invasion long enough for the outside world to rush to the Finns' aid. His first priority, therefore, was to prevent the Red Army crossing the Karelian Isthmus and reaching the capital, Helsinki. He could sacrifice virtually everywhere else.

### RED ARMY ADVANCED

Meretskov's soldiers made rapid progress. Petsamo, on the Barents Sea, fell on the first day, and the Red Army met no resistance in the northern forests. The mere sight of a Soviet tank scared the Finns. Unhindered, the Soviets advanced.

To the south, on the Karelian Isthmus, the Finns put on a show of resistance, destroying wells, burning houses, and

setting explosive traps and mines. "[The Finns] are masters of foul play," complained a Soviet war correspondent. "When our tired men wanted to drink, they found all the village wells filled with earth. Our enemies are perfidious [and] cowardly... Hardly had the first Red fighter set foot on Finnish soil when an explosion rent the air. Mines are everywhere."

It took a week to cover the 30 kilometres to the main defensive position, the Mannerheim Line, which acted as a barrier across the Karelian Isthmus. Here, the offensive stalled in the face of dogged Finn resistance.

### ACTION GAVE CONFIDENCE

Mannerheim's tactics worked, but a week's retreat had worn away the forces' morale. And Mannerheim was annoyed that the soldiers in the north were giving up so quickly. In order to strengthen his defence, he ordered action against the Soviet forces at Tolvajärvi, north of Lake Ladoga.

Under cover of night, 140 Finnish soldiers skied to a Soviet camp. The Soviets had lit huge bonfires to keep warm – and thus were perfectly lit targets. The Finns spread out on the crest of a hill. Without a sound, they slipped down through the camp, killed everyone. The attack spooked others in the Soviet camps, who began to shoot wildly in the dark. Very soon, the Soviet soldiers were fighting one another, while the Finns snuck away as invisibly as they'd arrived.

It was a total victory. Tolvajärvi convinced the Finns that they could easily take on the fight against their mighty enemy when they used their experience of surviving in the Finnish landscape to their advantage.

### ARMY EQUIPPED FOR WRONG WAR

The Soviets underestimated nature as an adversary. The soldiers had been sent out in the subarctic winter in olive-green summer uniforms, which provided neither warmth nor camouflage.

Few soldiers had winter boots, and hardly anyone could ski, which meant the Soviets and their heavy equipment were unable to move through the forests, where the snow was deep. Instead, the soldiers had stick to the roads, transforming the army into slow-moving columns, which were 20, 30 or 40 km long.

The Finnish soldiers, in their white overalls, could ski right up to the columns,

NAME **GUSTAF MANNERHEIM**

TITLE **FIELD MARSHAL**

1867-1951

**Finland's best man**

Finnish-Swedish aristocrat Gustaf Mannerheim made a career as a young man in the Imperial Russian Army, when Finland was part of Russia. In 1917, he left home and lead Finland's struggle for freedom. Mannerheim was about to retire when the Winter War broke out, but stayed to lead the defence. He also managed a brief stint as the country's president.

➤ Appointed field marshal in 1933.

➤ President of Finland 1944-46.





# 105 days of battle in deep snow and biting cold

The outcome of the war seemed certain: a huge and well-equipped Soviet army against poorly armed Finns. But the cold and local knowledge played crucial roles.

## 3 Forces penetrate deep into Finland

**30th November 1939:** Along the entire border, the Red Army sets up divisions that move in via east-to-west routes.

## 2 Bombs fall on Helsinki

**30th November 1939:** Two waves of Soviet bombers drop their payloads over the Finnish capital.

## 1 Soviets invade Isthmus

**30th November 1939:** The Soviet 7th Army launches an attack on the Karelian Isthmus with 14 divisions and three armoured brigades. But at the Mannerheim Line, the Finns hold back the offensive for two months.

## 4 Finns withdraw from the Barents Sea

**30th November 1939:** Soviet forces conquer the Finnish port city of Petsamo. The Finns retreat to the south to avoid a siege a long way from other units.

## 5 Attack boosts Finnish morale

**7th December 1939:** Under cover of night, 140 Finnish soldiers ski into a Soviet camp at Tolvajärvi. The attack lasts just four minutes and is an overwhelming success.

## 6 Soviets humiliated

**16th December 1939:** The Battle of Salla begins. In a matter of weeks, Finnish soldiers force the Soviet 122nd Division back 70 kilometres.

## 7 Division split into small pockets of resistance

**January 1940:** The Soviets' 168th Division goes north around Lake Ladoga to reach the Mannerheim Line from behind. But the Finns resist the attack by splitting the division into 11 small pockets, which are gradually defeated.

## 8 The Red Army is captured at Kuhmo

**28th January 1940:** Finnish border soldiers surround the Soviet 54th Division and divide it into three groups. Until the ceasefire in March, the Soviets are forced to survive on air-dropped supplies.

*The poorly provisioned Finnish army picked up lots of military equipment left behind by Soviet soldiers on the battlefield.*

### ARMY OF FINLAND

**SOLDIERS:** 180,000 men  
 ■ Of those, 130,000 stood at the Mannerheim Line.  
 † 26,000 soldiers were killed.

**TANKS:** 32

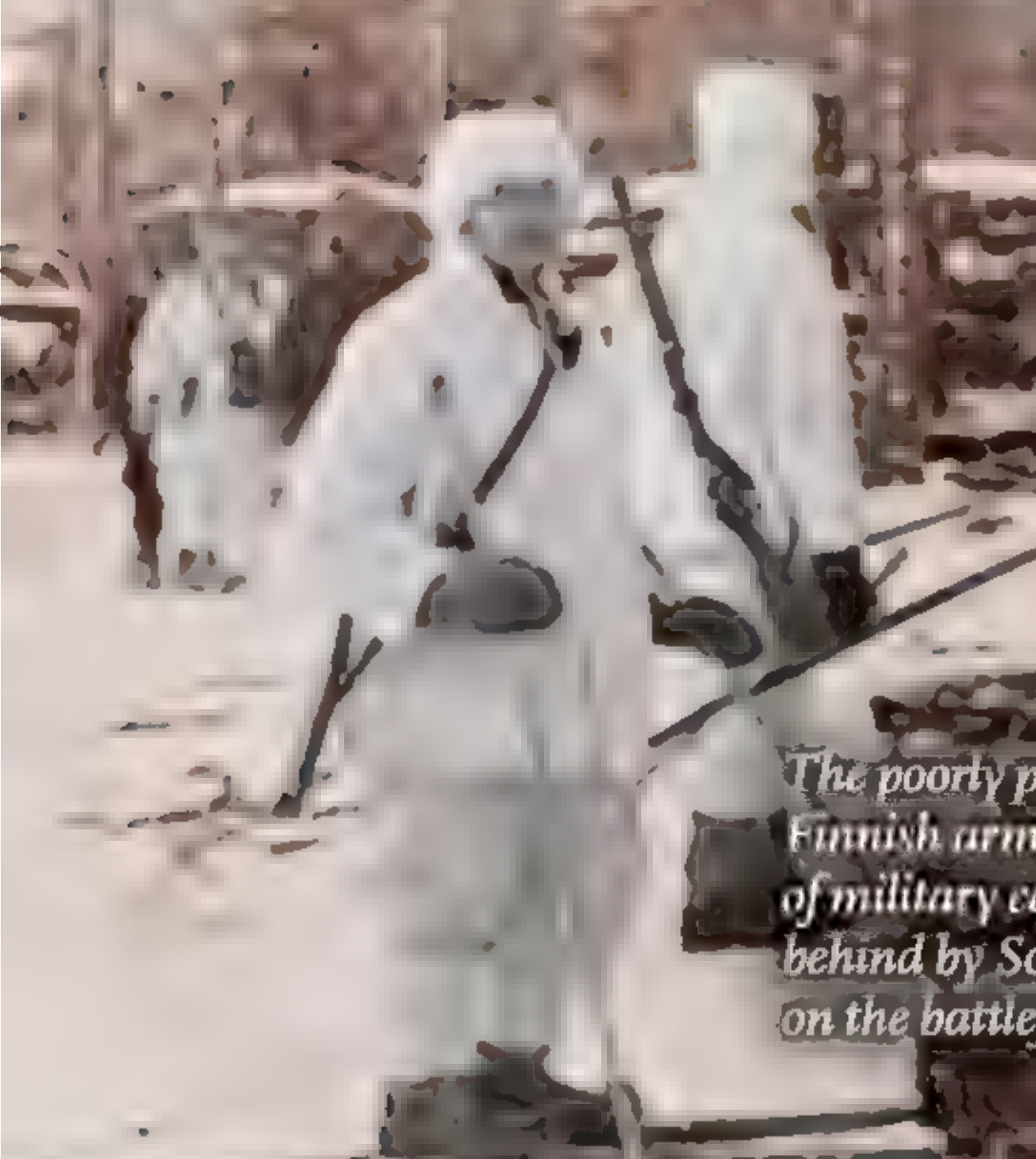
**AIRCRAFT:** 114

### SOVIET ARMY

**SOLDIERS:** 425,000 men  
 ■ In February 1940, the figure hit 998,000 soldiers.  
 † At least 250,000 killed.

**TANKS:** 6,500

**AIRCRAFT:** 3,880





sneak between trucks and tanks, launch grenades or Molotov cocktails, and be gone within seconds. A column could be halted by a few felled trees – and if tanks at the front were set on fire, the column was paralysed for hours.

Meretskov's offensive was hampered in most of Finland because his troops were equipped for a different type of war – a lightning war in open, central-European terrain.

### FINNS WIPED OUT TWO DIVISIONS

It was worse for the Soviet 44th and 163rd Divisions, which were crossing Finland. The goal was the Gulf of Bothnia. If the attackers could reach that far, they'd be able to cut the country in half and block the Finnish border with Sweden.

Another decisive battle began, and Mannerheim had to rely on the resourceful colonel Hjalmar Siilasvuo, who was in command of 17,000 well-armed Finnish soldiers.

Before the 163rd reached the logging town of Suomussalmi, the Finns burned down the houses. Then they blocked all the roads out of town, so the division was trapped and siege warfare could ensue.

Meanwhile, the 44th Division was approaching Suomussalmi from the south-east with fresh supplies for their trapped comrades. The Finns stopped the division's advance with felled tree trunks and repeated attacks on the flanks of the 40-kilometre column. Then the Finns were left to fight the 163rd.

On 28th December, the scattered survivors of the 163rd made their way on foot through the forests to the east. Back in Suomussalmi, lots of Soviet equipment was left behind – tanks, artillery, trucks and ammunition – that Hjalmar Siilasvuo could use to fight the 44th Division.

The cold, weary Soviet soldiers had abandoned any thoughts of an offensive. Instead, they spent their waking hours staring into the snow-covered forest, where death lurked in the form of

**13 percent**  
of Finland's territory  
was lost after the  
surrender in 1940.  
Over 400,000 Finns  
were evacuated from  
areas ceded to  
the Soviets.

### WHITE DEATH IN THE FOREST

- Snipers were one of the Finns' most effective weapons against the Soviets.
- The marksmen mainly targeted officers, but other ranks weren't safe either.
- Many snipers were armed with Soviet weapons taken from the battlefield.
- The Soviets called the sniper Simo Häyhä *Belaja Smert* – White Death.

*Simo Häyhä was a small, quiet, tough man from the Finnish forests. As a sniper, he killed 542 Soviets before being wounded himself.*



The Finnish soldiers wore white suits, which made them almost invisible in the snow.

snipers. Again and again, Finnish soldiers on skis swooped along the column. They threw grenades or Molotov cocktails at the tanks and shot at anyone they saw.

The Finns targeted the division's huge field kitchens, which drew attention to their

position with their thick clouds of smoke. Kitchen after kitchen was destroyed, and more and more soldiers had to cope with the biting, minus-40-degree cold without hot food.

The Finns succeeded in breaking the long Soviet column up into small pockets of resistance, which they called *motti* – a logger's term for small stacks of firewood that would be chopped up later. Slowly, the *mottis* died from hunger, cold and frequent Finnish attacks.

On 6th January 1940, the situation was so desperate that the commander of the 44th Division told his troops that it was now every man for himself. The result was panic. Fleeing soldiers trampled each other to death, with only 700 men escaping through the woods.

### SOLDIERS WERE INVISIBLE

Historians estimate that more than 25,000 of the 48,000 Soviet soldiers involved in the Battle of Raate Road perished – 30 times as many as the Finns lost. And the fleeing soldiers left behind a huge amount of war booty – 65 tanks, 400 trucks, 6,000 rifles, nearly 300 machine guns and mountains of ammunition. Immediately after their victory, the Finns began questioning the Soviet soldiers who had been captured. Why didn't they try to break out?

"Of course we tried to attack and open the road forward, but it was like banging your head against a wall," a chain-smoking Soviet officer told the Finnish interpreter. "We couldn't see the Finns anywhere. And believe it or not, the first Finns that I personally saw were the two that took me prisoner... We couldn't see them anywhere, yet they were all over the place. If anyone left the camp, he met with certain death."

The inept general of the 44th fled back to the Soviet Union, where he was court martialled. The charge read "the loss of 55 field kitchens". He was found guilty and immediately shot.

### STALIN SCOLDED COMMANDERS

Among the Soviet leadership, nerves were on edge. The nation was a laughing stock and its sovereignty threatened, as





*This medal was given to Finnish soldiers who had participated in the defence of the Karelian Isthmus.*

Stalin told his generals: "The authority of the Red Army is the guarantee of the USSR's national security.

If we struggle for a long time against such a weak opponent, this will stimulate the anti-Soviet forces of the imperialists."

The Soviet people were being fed propaganda to explain why the invincible Red Army was being humiliated in Finland; the weather and the harsh landscape were just two of the excuses. It was also claimed that the United States had deployed its thousand best pilots and that the Mannerheim Line was even stronger than the famous French Maginot Line at the German border.

The truth was that the Finnish defences, with approximately 100 fortifications of concrete and timber, were quite primitive. The fortifications were so far apart that a massed Soviet tank attack could have passed between them. Meretskov just didn't realise it.

At Christmas, Stalin replaced the useless field marshal with his old friend and veteran of the 1917 revolution, Semyon Timoshenko.

The new commander realised that Meretskov's tactics were wrong. Instead of trying to capture the vast northern Finnish forests, effort should have been concentrated on the Karelian Isthmus – the bridge to Helsinki.

In January, Timoshenko sent almost half a million fresh troops to the area. The Mannerheim Line had to be pulverised. The new tactic was not elegant, but it was effective, particularly as Stalin needed decisive action before France and Britain sent forces to help Finland.

### THE STORM BEGAN

On 1st February, hell broke out on the Karelian Isthmus. Hour after hour, Soviet guns shelled the Finnish positions, while bombers darkened the sky above. Over the following days, the deadly fire intensified. The ground was churned up several metres deep, and heavy concrete bunkers shook to their foundations.

Not since the German attack on Verdun in 1916 had the world seen such an intense bombardment. The Finns couldn't put up much of a resistance. Although the enemy positions were obvious, the Finns had limited heavy artillery and its use was rationed. Instead, they had to hide until the enemy was close enough to be defeated with lighter weaponry.

The Finnish soldiers didn't even dare to light bonfires, because the smoke would immediately attract the attention of Soviet artillery. For the first time in the war, the Finns froze and starved. With desperate courage, they held their positions for 12 days. Then the Soviets broke through the Mannerheim Line and were finally able to continue their offensive after a two-and-a-half month delay.

The Finns had to retreat to makeshift defences, hastily erected a few miles to the west, but they didn't last long, and Timoshenko was finally able to take Viipuri (now part of Russia and known as Vyborg).

The last desperate hope of foreign aid was extinguished. The help never came, and Finland was forced to make peace with the Soviets on 12th March 1940. The agreement gave Stalin 57,000 square kilometres of Finnish territory.

"We seem to have won just enough land to bury our dead," a Soviet general dryly noted.

# Finland sought revenge

The year after the Winter War, Finland started a new conflict to win back its lost territory in the wake of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union.

**WINTER WAR** After the 105-day Winter War, Stalin forced Finland to relinquish 13 percent of its land. Among the lost territory was the Karelian Isthmus, including the country's second-largest city, Viipuri, and several large industrial areas. Some areas to the north and small islands were also lost.

**26,000** Finnish soldiers died during the Winter War.

**250,000** Soviet soldiers lost their lives, many to Finnish snipers.

**CONTINUATION WAR** Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union enabled Finland to reclaim its lost territories. The so-called Continuation War was successful while Germany was doing well, but in 1944, Finland was forced to make peace.

**59,000** Finns died, with the front not advancing at all for long periods.

**200,000** Soviets fell, partly because Germany was arming the Finns.

**LAPLAND WAR** The condition for renewed peace with the Soviets in 1944 was that the borders were pushed back to where they'd been after the Winter War. The Finns also had to fight Germans in the north of the country in the Lapland War.

**1,000** Finns had to sacrifice their lives to defeat the Germans.

**2,000** Germans perished from September 1944 to April 1945.



*After the Winter War, over 400,000 Finns were forced to leave their homes in haste because the areas were to be surrendered to the Soviet Union.*



• SOUTH ATLANTIC SHOWDOWN •

# GRAF SPEE LOSES HER FINAL BATTLE

In 1939, German warship *Graf Spee* is pursuing British merchant ships in the South Atlantic and capturing their crews. But when Allied warships locate *Graf Spee*, a naval battle breaks out, which has surprising repercussions for Norway.

# 1939

17<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER





At 186 metres long, pocket battleship Admiral Graf Spee may have been smaller than a real battleship, but she was almost as powerful thanks to her 20 large guns.



## THE STAGE IS SET

➤➤ Pocket battleship *Graf Spee* is cruising in the Atlantic when World War II breaks out. Hitler orders her captain to attack British merchant ships, and over the following months *Graf Spee* spreads terror throughout the South Atlantic. The Allies cannot afford to ignore the threat and deploy a massive naval force to track her down.



**T**HE BRITISH CARGO LINER SS *CLEMENT* bobbed up and down on the Atlantic swell. It was a misty day at sea on 30th September 1939, 65 nautical miles north-east of the Brazilian port of Pernambuco. The British were at war with Nazi Germany, and Captain FCP Harris stood on *Clement's* bridge gazing out to sea. Suddenly, he spied a warship.

It must be HMS *Ajax*, he thought – the captain had been aboard the Royal Navy ship recently, and expected her still to be in the vicinity.

It wasn't long before Harris realised his mistake. A seaplane appeared, firing a hail of bullets. The aircraft was a German Arado 196, which was attached to the German warship *Admiral Graf Spee*, and it was *Graf Spee* that the captain had spotted. The salvo was a warning, and Harris soon received a signal via Morse code. He obeyed promptly, cutting the ship's engines and commanding his men into the lifeboats.

#### GERMAN CAPTAIN RESCUED ENGLISH SEAMEN

Captain Hans Langsdorff was *Graf Spee's* commander. He ordered *Clement* to be sunk and the British sailors rescued. Langsdorff was an experienced and highly decorated captain – in 1916 he'd been at the Battle of Jutland during World War I

#### 10,000 tonnes

was the maximum permitted size for German ships according to the Treaty of Versailles' stipulations. At 14,890 tonnes, *Graf Spee* easily broke this limit.

and was at sea with *Graf Spee* during the Spanish Civil War before taking command of her in 1938. The vessel and her 1,200-strong crew were in the South Atlantic when Germany invaded Poland on 1st September 1939, triggering World War II. Hitler ordered Langsdorff to immediately target Allied merchant ships while avoiding direct combat. *Clement* was the captain's first victim.

As *Clement* sank to the bottom, the British sailors in their lifeboats were directed to the nearest port while Captain Harris, his chief engineer and a seaman requiring medical treatment were brought onboard *Graf Spee*. Harris was questioned and then handed over to a passing neutral steamship with his two crewmen. No Britons were hurt.

The story was repeated several times over the following months. *Graf Spee* would detect a cargo ship, the crew would be ordered into their lifeboats, and the ship sunk. Often, however, hijacks took place far from land, and instead of sending the seamen on a dangerous voyage in lifeboats, Langsdorff imprisoned them together on his support vessel, *Altmark*, which brought supplies to the pocket battleship.

#### NINE GROUPS HUNTED GRAF SPEE

By 9th December, nine freighters had fallen prey to *Graf Spee*.

The Germans captured 299 sailors, but not a single life was lost. However, Langsdorff's raids were a serious threat to the Allies' critical supply lines. The British deployed no fewer than nine groups of powerful warships to hunt down and destroy *Graf Spee*. But the task proved to be a difficult one in the vast Atlantic ocean.

On 13th December, Hunting Group G finally reported success. The three British vessels spotted *Graf Spee* off the coast of Uruguay. Unfortunately, the German battleship had also caught sight of them. Alarms were sounded on the ship, and her entire crew stood ready at their posts. At 06.18, *Graf Spee's* large guns fired a deafening burst. Shortly after, the

*Hitler wasn't a fan of life at sea but was thrilled with the modern pocket battleship Graf Spee.*





# Nine British merchant vessels fell victim to Graf Spee

Merchant ships were easy prey for *Graf Spee* with her heavy guns and powerful engines. Nine British commercial vessels were sunk in nine weeks before Royal Navy warships caught up with *Graf Spee* off Uruguay.

*Graf Spee's bell was removed and preserved by the crew.*



## Battleship had extended range

*Graf Spee* was followed by the supply vessel *Altmark*, which could supply extra fuel. This extended the pocket battleship's range enabling her to chase British ships all the way into the Indian Ocean.

**5** 08.00  
*Graf Spee* is badly damaged and is forced to head towards neutral Uruguay.

**4** 07.25  
*Ajax* is hit, and a gun turret destroyed. *Ajax* and *Achilles* temporarily halt their pursuit.

**3** 06.36  
*Graf Spee* is hit. The warship lays down smoke and tries to escape.

## Graf Spee was forced to flee

As the pocket battleship traded fire with three British warships, her fate was sealed. After several exchanges, *Graf Spee* was forced to sail to Montevideo, capital of neutral Uruguay.

**1** 06.18  
*Graf Spee* opens fire on the cruisers *Exeter*, *Ajax* and *Achilles*.

**2** 06.20  
*Exeter* returns fire, with *Ajax* and *Achilles* following suit minutes later.

British ships split up. *Exeter* sails on alone.

→ German course  
→ British course

*Graf Spee* ended up as a burning wreck off Montevideo, scuttled by her own crew.

### Admiral Graf Spee

Type:	Pocket battleship
Length:	186 metres
Width:	21.7 m
Depth:	7.3 m
Weight:	14,890 tonnes
Primary armament:	6x 280-mm guns 8x 150-mm guns
Top speed:	28.5 knots
Range:	35,000 km
Crew	1,200 men





ship fired again. Langsdorff hoped to crush all three ships at once using his superior firepower, but the British had a countermove: the naval force split in two, with the heavy cruiser HMS *Exeter* sailing west while the two lighter cruisers, HMS *Ajax* and HMS *Achilles*, continued on their north-easterly heading. The British captains planned to take advantage of their numbers to catch their opponent in a pincer manoeuvre. *Graf Spee* had gone from hunter to hunted.

A flurry of activity broke out aboard the three British ships, and at 06.20 they returned fire from a distance of ten nautical miles. *Exeter* fired her front battery while the two smaller ships followed up with their own salvos, but little damage was done to *Graf*

*Spee*. Langsdorff trained his heavy guns on *Exeter* and the Germans' third barrage hit the British heavy cruiser. Many crewmen were killed and when *Graf Spee* struck again shortly afterwards, a fierce fire broke out. *Exeter* was in trouble – her engine room was littered with dead sailors while her captain struggled to return fire.

But as *Graf Spee* had focused on *Exeter*, the two smaller British ships drew closer. Langsdorff was now forced to deal with a battle on two fronts. He ordered the ship to sail after *Exeter* to deliver the final blow, but *Graf Spee* had also been hit, and the damage proved serious. One of *Exeter*'s shells had penetrated two decks before exploding, destroying the ship's desalination plant and lubricating oil-

## 2 sister ships

were built alongside *Graf Spee*: *Deutschland* and *Admiral Scheer*. Both fought in the Baltic in 1945 before being sunk by Allied bombers in the final days of the war.





*The Exeter's crew were jubilant after the cruiser knocked Graf Spee out of action at Río de la Plata.*



cleaning system. At the same time, the smaller cruisers were now swarming around *Graf Spee*, throwing everything they had at the ship. After several hits, she was forced to flee. The battle had barely lasted an hour.

#### **CAPTAIN HOPED FOR NEUTRAL AID**

*Exeter* was forced to turn south to the Falkland Islands, while the two smaller cruisers shadowed *Graf Spee*, which set course for Montevideo in neutral Uruguay. The first major naval battle of the war was over, killing 36 Germans and 72 British.

*Graf Spee* reached the mouth of Río de la Plata at Montevideo that evening. Langsdorff hoped that Uruguay would allow the Germans to repair their ship, but he was to be disappointed. Over the following days, the British put huge pressure on the tiny country and the captain was instructed to leave the

*British officers were issued with intricately engineered brass compasses.*

harbour within 72 hours. Before then, though, the Germans would be permitted ashore to bury their dead. The crew donned their parade uniforms to attend the mass funeral.

Meanwhile, Hitler was closely following events from Berlin. *Graf Spee* was one of the fleet's most important warships and could under no circumstances be lost. Hitler ordered Langsdorff to put up a fight, but the captain was nervous. Intelligence suggested a large British naval force was gathering near the harbour and Langsdorff would be



EIGHT DRAMATIC DAYS

## CAPTAIN COULDN'T LIVE WITH DEFEAT

**13th December** Hunting Group G's complement of ships spot *Graf Spee*. A fierce sea battle ensues. After around an hour of fighting, the Germans are forced to accept they cannot win and *Graf Spee* flees towards the coast.

**14th December** After a night at sea, *Graf Spee* anchors in a neutral port in Uruguay. Under heavy pressure from Britain, Uruguay orders the ship to leave within 72 hours.

**15th December** 36 dead German sailors are buried in a Montevideo cemetery. Meanwhile, news arrives that a large British naval force is approaching.



**17th December** The Germans mine *Graf Spee* and move the ship out of the harbour. Once the crew are on board an Argentine tug, Captain Langsdorff orders the ship destroyed. The crew continues to Argentina.

**19th December** The German-friendly government in Argentina welcomes the crew from *Graf Spee*, but the captain has deep regrets about abandoning his ship.

**20th December** With the crew's well-being secured, Langsdorff spreads *Graf Spee*'s flag across his bed, lays down upon it and shoots himself in the head.

condemning his men to almost certain death. In fact, the intelligence was false, planted by British agents over the radio. Only one heavy cruiser lay close to Uruguay, while the rest of the naval force remained several days' away. But Langsdorff chose to believe the information and to avoid certain death ordered *Graf Spee* be towed to shallow water and scuttled.

While the battleship lay a smoking wreck at the entrance to Montevideo, the crew sailed to friendlier waters in Argentina nearby. But Langsdorff refused to be seen as a coward. Having secured his crew's well-being, on 19th December in Buenos Aires, he lay on the ship's flag and shot himself in the head.

### SUPPORT SHIP ESCAPED TO NORWAY

As the battle unfolded, the crew of *Graf Spee*'s support ship had been following the events from a safe distance. *Altmark* had withdrawn when the fighting began, but the men clearly heard the blasts from the warships' guns. They had been powerless to do anything to help their comrades aboard the pocket battleship, but had hoped for a swift victory.

Over the radio came news that *Graf Spee* had sailed to Montevideo, and the *Altmark* crew also heard tell of a superior British naval force. Her officers believed there was no other option but to try and sail home to Germany with the 299 prisoners in the ship's hold.

But her voyage was delayed. The sea battle off the Río de la Plata had attracted many Allied ships. The officers on *Altmark* chose to lie low and wait for the furore to die down. It wasn't until 22nd January 1940, when British warships had left the area, that the ship began her journey back to Europe.

Disguised by ever-changing neutral flags, *Altmark* safely reached the North Atlantic, avoiding attention from Allied sea patrols. The ship took a detour far to the north to increase her chances of escape, selecting neutral Norway as her destination. On 14th February, *Altmark* reached Norwegian waters.

International law during World War II stated that merchant ships of warring nations could pass through neutral territories



Hans Langsdorff

The highly decorated Captain Hans Langsdorff was given command of *Graf Spee* in 1938.



– so long as their cargo wasn't linked to war operations. Clearly, the 299 British POWs were part of Germany's war effort, but they were well hidden in the hold when the Norwegian navy, at the behest of the British, inspected the ship. Nothing suspicious was found despite being boarded three times, but the Germans refused to allow the Norwegians to examine the entire ship. It was an embarrassing position for the Norwegians, who were simply hoping to avoid being dragged into the middle of a major confrontation.

### CHURCHILL ORDERED ATTACK

Back in Britain, however, First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill was convinced something was amiss. *Graf Spee* had released her remaining prisoners of war before the ship was scuttled, and those British sailors had confirmed they'd been well-treated. But the seamen had also reported that *Altmark* was carrying a cargo of captured British sailors. Churchill chose to trust their word over that of the Norwegian authorities.

Shortly after noon on 16th February, a British plane sounded the alarm after spotting *Altmark* at Egersund in south-west Norway. The destroyer HMS *Cossack* was one of several Royal Navy warships in the area and moved swiftly to intercept *Altmark*, which sought refuge in the Jøssingfjord. Several smaller Norwegian warships also headed towards the site, desperate to prevent the British from breaching Norwegian neutrality. If the British drew close and managed to board the ship, then Germany would no doubt view it as a provocation.

On the other hand, Norway risked angering the British if *Altmark* was permitted to sail unchallenged to Germany. The Norwegians were in the last place they wanted to be: between a rock and a hard place. They were caught in the middle of two of the strongest powers in Europe and the government couldn't afford to offend either Britain or Germany.

In the Jøssingfjord, *Cossack* reached *Altmark*, and her captain, Philip Vian, demanded the Norwegians force the Germans to surrender the British prisoners. They responded that *Altmark* had already been investigated and no prisoners had been found onboard. In addition, the German ship was a merchant vessel, allowed to sail through Norwegian waters.

Vian didn't buy the explanation. He contacted Churchill directly and received an unequivocal order in response: "board *Altmark*, liberate the prisoners, and take possession of the ship". If the Norwegians opened fire, "defend yourself, using no more force than is necessary".

At midnight on 16th February 1940, *Cossack* sailed right up to the virtually defenceless supply vessel. She lay alongside *Altmark* and British soldiers boarded the ship with bayonets raised. In a fierce close-quarters battle, seven German sailors died. The British took control of the ship and went directly to the cargo hold. Below decks, the soldiers cried:

"Any Englishmen here?"

"Yes! We are all British!" came the response.

"Well, the navy's here," came the rejoinder to cheers. *Cossack* conveyed the prisoners back to Britain where they were later received in London to great acclaim.



The *Graf Spee*'s crew sported brass buttons on their uniforms.

# The war came to Norway

The confrontation in the Jøssingfjord saved the prisoners aboard the *Altmark*, but led to Norway and Denmark being drawn into the war.

The *Altmark* incident was an important propaganda victory for Britain, but also made the country doubt Norway's neutrality. Had the Norwegians deliberately avoided finding the 299 British prisoners aboard the *Altmark*, thereby aiding the Germans?


At the same time, the British campaign against *Altmark* in neutral Norwegian waters infuriated Hitler. Norway's navy had been present and, in the opinion of the Nazi leader, should have intervened. Norway defended itself by saying that, according to international law, a neutral country was under no obligation to use force against a superior power – and the British destroyer *Cossack* was far superior to the Norwegian coastguard's vessels.

Hitler was concerned that Norway might allow Allied soldiers to gain a foothold in the strategically important region. It gave him a pretext to advance plans for Operation Weserübung – a German invasion of Denmark and Norway. Less than two months after the *Altmark* incident, the Nazis invaded.



The British prisoners of war were freed after a brief skirmish on the *Altmark*.





*With its ice-free port, Narvik was a strategically important location for dominating the North Atlantic. Both the Germans and the British wanted the city.*

1940

8<sup>TH</sup> APRIL





RACE FOR THE NORTH ATLANTIC

# TWO MEN RACE FOR NORWAY

Shortly after the British declared war against Germany in September 1939, First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill wanted to open a front against Hitler in Scandinavia. But the British PM, Neville Chamberlain, was hesitant. When the decision was finally made, it sparked a race for control of the North Atlantic.



## THE STAGE IS SET



France and Britain declare war on Germany after it invades Poland on 1st September 1939. The two Allied nations remember World War I's arduous trench warfare in Northern France, and neither wants a repeat. As they look for another site for their confrontation with Germany, their gaze falls upon Scandinavia...



**N**ORWAY WASN'T SEEN as being of any great significance initially by the German dictator, Adolf Hitler. His eyes were on France. The German navy, however, was interested in it – especially its long west coast. The German admirals recalled the British blockade during World War I, when the German navy had been hemmed in by the British. This time they wanted their fleet to have a wide spread of bases to avoid being trapped once more. Norway's coast was ideal.

Grand Admiral Erich Raeder raised the subject of Norway with Hitler on 10th October 1939. He explained to those assembled that if the British established bases in Norway, they would not only control the entrance to the Baltic but would also be able to disrupt German naval operations in the North Sea. Germany's import of Swedish iron ore, which was crucial to the Nazis' arms industry, would also be threatened.

Raeder suggested that Germany should move to occupy a number of strategic locations on the Norwegian west coast. Afterwards, it could build bases there, which would give the German fleet almost unopposed access to the Atlantic. Hitler rejected the idea. Despite Raeder's arguments, the land offensive in the West remained his first priority.

#### CHURCHILL WANTED A NEW FRONT

Five weeks earlier, on 3rd September 1939, Britain declared war on Germany and Winston Churchill was appointed first

**“We are fighting to save the whole world from the pestilence of Nazi tyranny”**

Winston Churchill, 3rd September 1939

lord of the admiralty. Speaking to the House of Commons the same day, Churchill proclaimed that, “We are fighting to save the whole world from the pestilence of Nazi tyranny.”

But despite this fighting talk, the Allies lacked the strength to attack Germany directly. Instead, Churchill

wanted to start the war in Scandinavia. At the Cabinet meeting on 19th September, he recommended laying mines in Norwegian waters to disrupt the crucial iron-ore shipments.

The majority of the country's ore imports came from the northern Swedish mines at Kiruna and Gällivare. And while much of the ore was shipped through the Swedish port of Luleå, almost a third was imported via the ice-free Norwegian port of Narvik. That was Churchill's target.

The admiralty man believed that mining Norwegian waters would provoke the Germans into launching a counterattack, giving the superior British fleet a few easy victories and possibly encouraging Sweden and Norway to join the Allies. Furthermore, a German attack would give the British an excuse to move into Scandinavia and establish bases in Norway.

The British government wasn't sold on Churchill's proposal, however. Such a proactive form of defence within the borders of a neutral country like Norway didn't fit with its image as the protector of Europe's small states. The admiralty's proposal might also backfire and push Norway into Germany's arms. But then another solution suddenly appeared.

#### THE SOVIET UNION INVADED FINLAND

On 30th November 1939, the Winter War between Finland and the mighty Soviet Union broke out. The Allies decided to send help to the Finns. This would give the Allies the opportunity to cut off Germany's ore supplies while maintaining its image as a protector. The Allied planners just needed to make sure that both Narvik and Sweden's iron-ore mines were occupied as part of their auxiliary action.

In Germany, the Scandinavian question was also becoming more urgent. Nazi leaders feared the Soviet invasion of Finland might push the worried Scandinavian governments into the arms of the Western powers. The German-Soviet non-aggression pact meant the Nazi government could not condemn the Soviet offensive, which reinforced anti-German sentiments in Norway



*The German arms industry depended on Swedish iron ore. About one third of it was shipped via Narvik in Norway.*



and Sweden. Hitler began to reconsider Raeder's earlier suggestion – especially when the latter received new intelligence.

On 10th December the leader of the Norwegian fascist party, *Nasjonal Samling* (National Union), arrived in Berlin. Vidkun Quisling saw Nazi Germany as a vital bulwark against Soviet domination. In a meeting with Raeder, Quisling claimed that the Norwegian government was in secret negotiations with the British to offer them access to Norwegian bases. A few days later, Hitler ordered his armed forces to draw up plans for a possible military occupation of Norway.

### ALTMARK BECOMES CRUCIAL

Hitler finally committed to the occupation two months later, following a British operation conducted within Norwegian waters. In mid-February 1940, the German supply vessel *Altmark* was discovered by British aircraft in international waters near Norway. The British suspected that the vessel was carrying British prisoners, but before the Royal Navy could intercept the vessel, it fled into Norwegian territorial waters.

The British followed and bordered *Altmark*, freeing the 299 British sailors who were on board. The Germans were furious, believing the event to demonstrate both the Norwegians' inability to defend their neutrality and Britain's disdain for it.

At the same time, the German intelligence service succeeded in decoding British naval communications, which indicated that the Allies were preparing for operations inside Norway on the pretext of helping Finland.

Hitler had previously toyed with the idea of staging a coup in Norway with Quisling as his puppet, but after the *Altmark* incident, he dropped the idea in favour of a military solution. On 19th February, he appointed a new man to lead the invasion of Norway: 54-year-old infantry general Nikolaus von Falkenhorst. Falkenhorst

1874-1965

NAME **WINSTON CHURCHILL**

TITLE — FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY

**The Germans would be lured north**

At the outbreak of World War II, Winston Churchill was given the post of first lord of the admiralty. He wanted a direct military confrontation with the Germans, but preferably far from both Germany and Britain. Therefore, he devised a campaign in Norway. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's early ambivalence to the plan was instrumental in the operation's failure. Chamberlain resigned on 10th May 1940, leaving Churchill to lead Britain during the rest of the war.

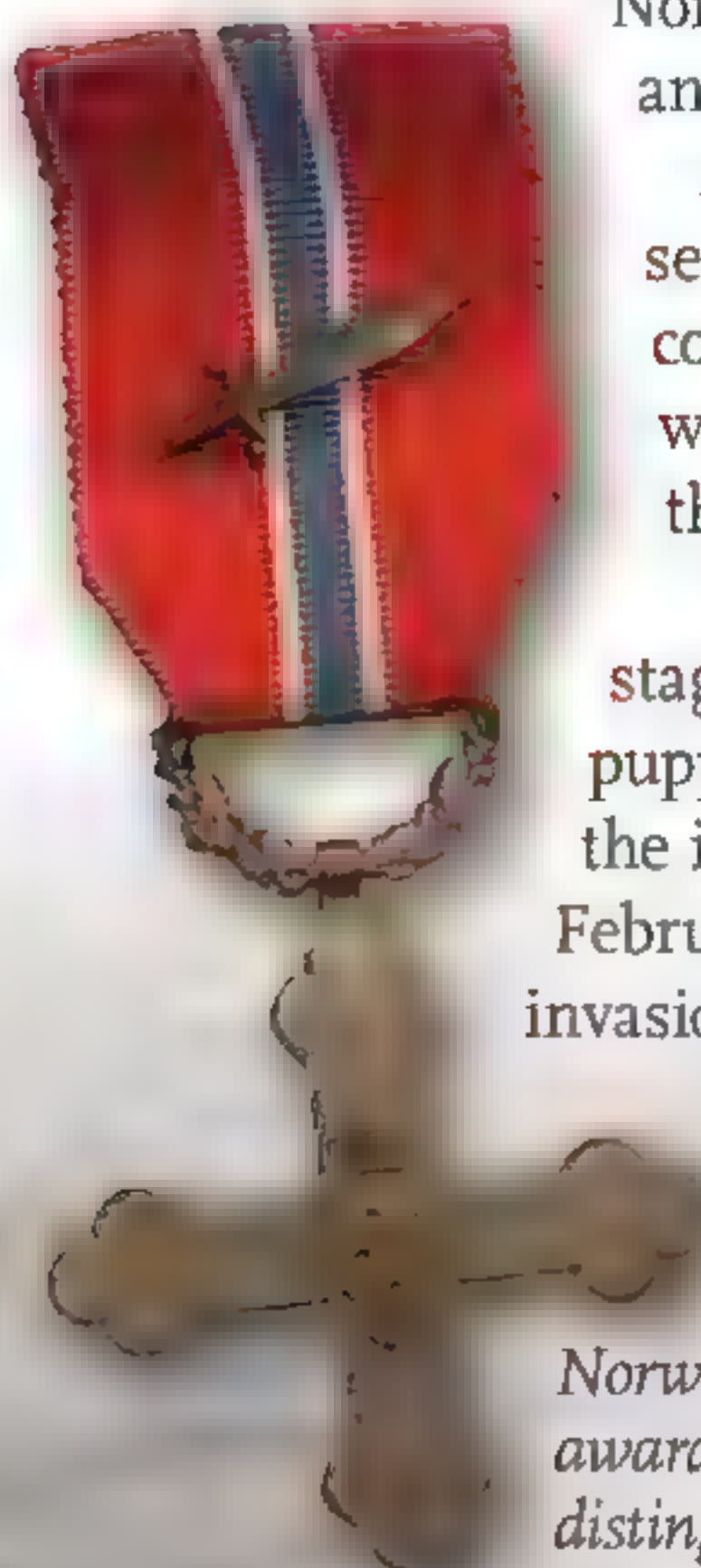
- First Lord of the Admiralty 1939-1940.
- Prime Minister (first term) 1940-1945.




knew nothing about Norway, but his service as an officer in Finland in 1918 was deemed to be sufficient for the role. Hitler gave the general an afternoon to come up with an outline plan for Norway's subjugation.

Based on a guidebook purchased at a local bookstore, Falkenhorst immediately set to work on the strategy. A few hours later, he submitted the draft proposal for Hitler's approval. He got the nod and the real planning for Operation Weserübung – as the invasion of Norway was codenamed – got underway.

On 29th February, Falkenhorst and his staff officers presented the detailed strategy, which now also included the occupation of Denmark. The previous plan that depended on the Danes handing over airbases to the Germans as a result of diplomatic pressure was considered too risky. Instead, Falkenhorst recommended taking the country – or, at the very least, the Jutland peninsula – by force. In the end, the army's



Norway's War Cross was awarded to six Norwegians who distinguished themselves in the defence of Norway in 1940.



The Royal Navy laid mines in the waters around Norway in an attempt to throttle the Germans' supply of iron ore.



## MILITARY BUILD-UP

IRON ORE MINES  
AND NAVAL BASES ARE AT STAKE

1939

## 3RD SEPTEMBER

**German war industry requires ore**

At the outbreak of World War II, Germany is importing around nine million tonnes of iron ore from Sweden. One third of it is shipped via Narvik in Norway.

## 19TH SEPTEMBER

**The British plan to blockade the port of Narvik**

Winston Churchill proposes laying mines along the coast of Norway to reduce Germany's iron ore supplies.

## 10TH OCTOBER

**German navy wants Norwegian naval bases**

Fearing a British blockade, the German navy asks Hitler to target bases on the Norwegian coast.

## 30TH NOVEMBER

**The Soviet Union invades Finland**

The Winter War erupts between Finland and the Soviet Union.

1940

## 12TH MARCH

**Allies offer assistance to Finland**

British submarines sail to Norway under the pretext of helping Finland, but the Finnish-Soviet ceasefire scuppers their plans.

## 7TH APRIL

**56 German ships sail north**

Hitler decides to occupy Norway and Denmark. 56 warships leave Germany with several thousand soldiers on-board.

## 8TH APRIL

**British are beaten**

British warships are in the process of mining the Norwegian fjords when the German fleet arrives. *HMS Glowworm*, a small G-class destroyer, gets into a battle with the superior German battle cruiser *Admiral Hipper*. The British vessel sinks after trying to ram the cruiser.

*British mine-laying vessels were the first to reach Norway's coast on 8th April 1940.*

*This German uniform badge commemorates the invasion of Norway in 1940.*



commanders agreed that all Denmark should be occupied.

Meanwhile, the Allies were struggling to agree their approach. The French were in favour of an operation in northern Scandinavia. It would open a new front and take the war to someone else's doorstep. The horror of the World War I trenches in northern France was still fresh in their memory.

The British, on the other hand, were more cautious, and it wasn't until 12th March that British submarines arrived in the Skagerrak strait between Norway, Denmark and Sweden. The following day, however, the Allies learned that Finland had entered into a ceasefire arrangement with the Soviet Union. The British were forced to cancel their operation and recall their subs.

Back in Britain, Chamberlain still felt under pressure to act. At the Supreme War Council on 28th March, he decided to push Churchill's earlier proposal to lay sea-mines around Norway. France agreed and Operation Wilfred, as the mining action was termed, was scheduled to take place eight days later on 5th April.

The Allies also agreed to launch a separate attack, known as Operation Royal Marine, to commence a day before Wilfred. This secondary operation would release hundreds of specially designed mines into French rivers and waterways, which would float on into the German canal system, halting traffic there.

The Allies knew that there was a danger that Wilfred might provoke a German invasion of Southern Norway. If that were to happen, the Allies planned to launch a third operation – called R 4 – in which they would land troops at Narvik, Trondheim, Bergen and Stavanger, and occupy the Swedish ore mines.

The troops earmarked for this third operation were due to leave Scotland on 8th April, but the French were starting to get





cold feet. They feared that the mines released into France's waterways as part of Operation Royal Marine might lead to a German attack on France's industrial areas. The French government also argued that the Allies might be inviting criticism if their first offensive was directed at a neutral country rather than at Nazi Germany itself.

But without Operation Royal Marine, Operation Wilfred might be compromised. On 5th April, an annoyed Chamberlain sent Churchill to Paris to persuade the French to sanction Operation Royal Marine, but the French refused to budge. Operation Wilfred would have to be conducted in isolation. But instead of laying the mines on 5th April, Operation Wilfred had now been pushed back to 04.30 on 8th April – a delay that would have serious repercussions.

### EXCUSE TO ATTACK

In Germany, an impatient Raeder asked Hitler on 26th March to launch Operation Weserübung as soon as possible, pointing out that the new moon on 7th April would provide the best conditions. After internal discussions between all the services involved in the operation, Hitler ordered the invasion of Norway to begin at 04.15 on 9th April.

However, the day before, on the morning of 8th April, Hitler learned that the British fleet had begun laying mines around the Norwegian fjords. He immediately seized the

chance to use the British operation as a pretext for the already-planned German invasion.

"Now we possess a basis for attack," the German dictator declared enthusiastically.

At the same time, just as Operation Wilfred was due to begin, the British received reports of German naval movements in the North Sea, but they were uncertain what they signified. Were the Germans trying to break through to the Atlantic, or was it a reaction to the British operation?

## "Now we possess a basis for attack"

Adolf Hitler, 8th April 1940

A German invasion coming at exactly the same time as Wilfred was due to start was hard to believe. Nevertheless, the British decided to postpone landing troops in Norway and instead focussed on what they believed would be a decisive battle against the German navy. In the meantime, they continued to mine the Norwegian fjords as planned.

At noon, an Allied submarine sank a German troop transport ship off Southern Norway. Norwegian fishing boats rescued hundreds of German soldiers. They claimed that they had been on their way to Bergen to protect the city from a British land invasion. However, the head of the British Home Fleet, Admiral Charles Forbes, wasn't given this vital intelligence until 11 hours later, at 23:00.

Time was running out for the British, and the next morning, at 04.15 on the 9th April, the Germans invaded – the Allies had lost the race for Norway.

### PERSPECTIVE

## Germans were gifted Nordic lands

Norway and Denmark were important to the Germans, but Sweden had no strategic value and retained its conditional independence.

When the British abandoned their attempt to land troops in Norway, they basically ceded the Nordic territories to the Nazis.

Sweden had no strategic value for Germany and was allowed to remain free under certain conditions, as outlined in a memo drafted by the Reich's foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and delivered on 9th April to Sweden's foreign minister Christian Günther. It stated that Sweden should "refrain from any kind of measures directed against the German occupation of Denmark and Norway", that "the German government expects that ore deliveries to Germany will be maintained" and that British-inspired acts of sabotage would be prevented.

The Swedes bowed to the terms while outwardly maintaining a neutral stance. However, its ongoing trade helped the Nazi war machine. Over two million German troops were also allowed through Sweden to reach Norway and the Eastern Front.



During the war, around two million German soldiers entered Norway and Finland via Sweden.



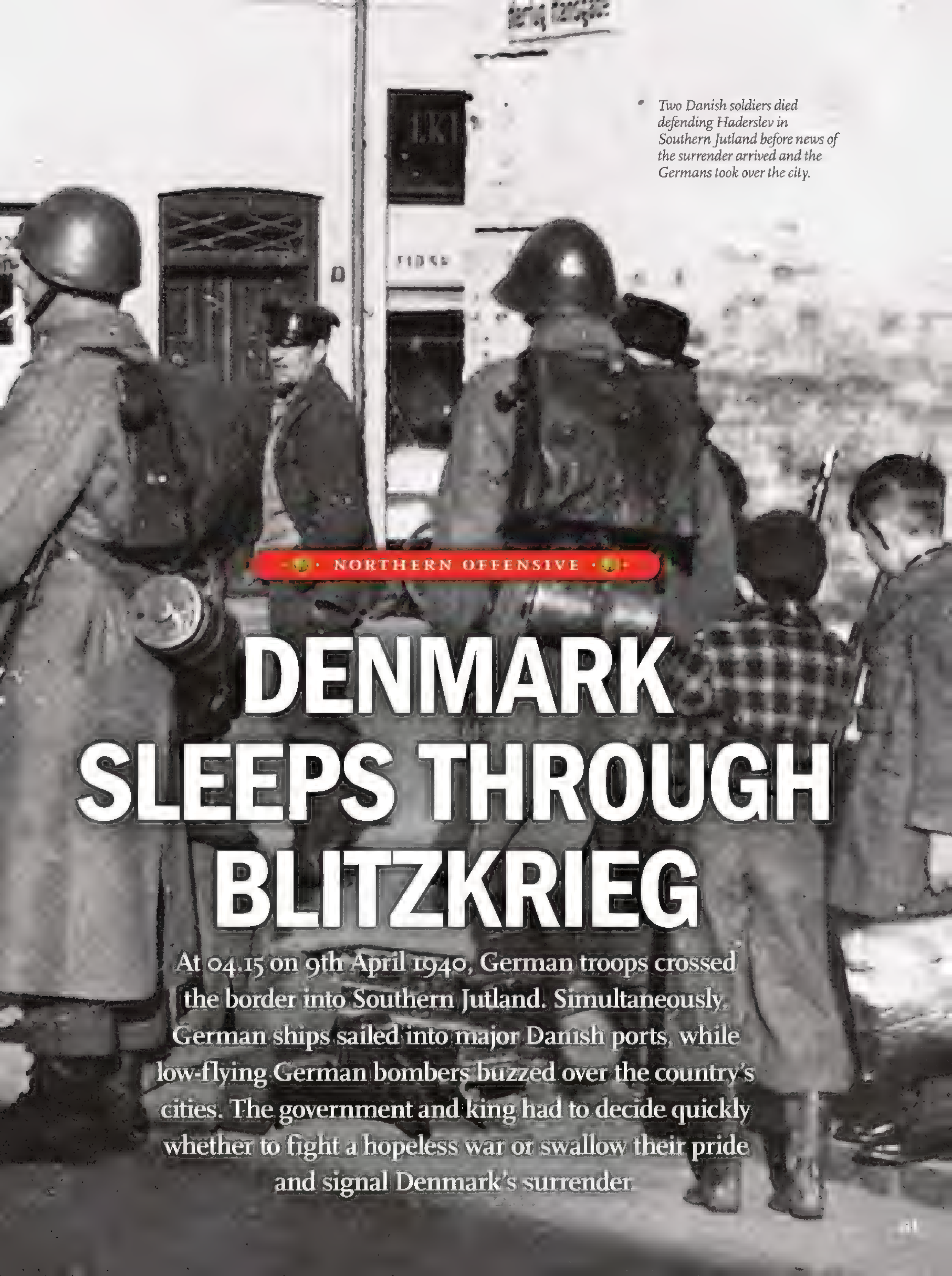
FRISOR  
FRISOR

Frisor

1940

9<sup>TH</sup> APRIL



- 
- Two Danish soldiers died defending Haderslev in Southern Jutland before news of the surrender arrived and the Germans took over the city.

• NORTHERN OFFENSIVE •

# DENMARK SLEEPS THROUGH BLITZKRIEG

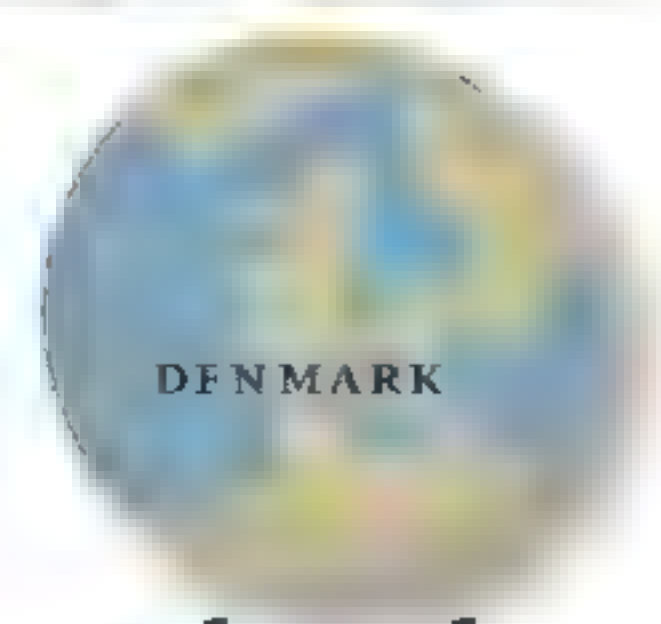
At 04.15 on 9th April 1940, German troops crossed the border into Southern Jutland. Simultaneously, German ships sailed into major Danish ports, while low-flying German bombers buzzed over the country's cities. The government and king had to decide quickly whether to fight a hopeless war or swallow their pride and signal Denmark's surrender.



## THE STAGE IS SET



On 31st May 1939, Denmark signed a non-aggression pact with Germany in the hope it would prevent any future invasion. Now, Hitler's troops are in the north, but the Danes fear mobilising their reserves in case it offends Germany. As a result, only a few Danish soldiers are on duty on 9th April 1940 when the Nazis arrive.



**A** SHOT IN THE DISTANCE WOKE BØRGE OUTZE in his hotel bed in Tønder, Southern Denmark. The 28-year-old journalist got up quickly and told his wife that they had to leave immediately. A reporter for the Danish daily newspaper *Nationaltidende*, Outze had access to intelligence, and had been expecting German soldiers to cross the border on 9th April 1940.

That's why he and his wife, Ruth, had slept fully dressed. They trudged through the still-sleeping hotel down to their car, which Outze had deliberately parked right in front of the

hotel door. Outze turned the key, accelerated and drove out of Tønder, just as the German troops moved in. Behind them, the couple heard wheels rumbling over the city's stone bridge, while the sound of caterpillar tracks woke the townsfolk, who opened their windows to see what was happening.

Once out of town, Outze sped off at 120 km/h, heading north-east. The journalist had to get away from the occupied zone, because he'd agreed with his editor on the Copenhagen-based broadsheet that he would cover the impending war from the Danish side of the front line. Outze had no idea that there would never be a defensive line or that the whole of Denmark would be occupied just a few hours later.

#### SLEEPY MINISTER GIVEN ULTIMATUM

The military conquest of Denmark was not part of Hitler's plan initially. The neighbouring nations had made a non-aggression pact as early as May 1939, and from its position of neutrality, the Danish government, led by Thorvald Stauning, hoped to prevent Denmark becoming involved in the war. However, Adolf Hitler changed tack when, late in the winter of 1940, he commanded his officers to prepare plans for a campaign in Norway.

Leading the invasion of Denmark, code-named Operation Weserübung-Süd, was General Leonard von Kaupisch. In March, he ordered the mobilisation of the Nazi war machine in northern Germany. Everything was done in secrecy, but in the days leading up to 9th April, it was clear that something was brewing. Danish lorry drivers passed a 60-km military column of nearly 2,500 vehicles in northern Germany, and sailors reported seeing significant German naval activity in the Great Belt strait.

Although ministers and the military still hoped that it was nothing more than German preparations for a war in Norway, it was clear that Denmark would not be able to defeat that many German troops if they crossed its border. However, fearful of agitating the militant giant, with which the country had, after all, signed a treaty of non-aggression, the government decided not to call up its 54,000 reservists.

Thus, on the night of 9th April, Danish defences consisted of just 16,000 men against the 38,000 highly trained German soldiers, who also had large numbers of modern aircraft and tanks to back them up. Hitler and von Kaupisch therefore believed that Germany's neighbour would submit quickly and that its ministers would accept the Nazi peace terms.

The Danish government was under pressure. Quarter of an hour before German troops crossed the border into Southern



Nazi bombers flew low over Copenhagen early in the morning of 9th April to exert pressure on the government to make a decision regarding the German ultimatum.



Jutland, the telephone rang for the foreign minister, Peter Munch. The minister's staff was surprised when the man on the other end of the line – the German envoy in Denmark, Cecil von Renthe-Fink – demanded an immediate meeting with the foreign minister. At 04.20, the doorbell rang at 5 Østre Allé, a private residence in Copenhagen. In full uniform, Renthe-Fink greeted the minister and handed him a written justification for the Nazi invasion. The German envoy briefly explained that the occupation was intended to save Denmark from a British-French attack.

"The German government hereby undertakes the protection of Denmark for the duration of the war," the papers said, which also contained 13 demands for the Danish authorities. The first said that the Nazis "expect the Danish government and the Danish people to understand the German procedure and expect them not to offer any resistance". Renthe-Fink pointed out that the Germans required a speedy acceptance of the conditions, but they would continue the invasion either way. If Denmark didn't

## The illegal

news agency known as Information was founded during the war by Børge Outze. After the war, it became the newspaper Information, with Outze as editor-in-chief.

surrender, the Nazis would start bombing their largest cities.

A frustrated Munch protested against the violation of his country's neutrality, stressing that he had to meet with the prime minister and king before a decision could be made. However, now the Danish government had officially been presented with Germany's proposition, the Nazi troops stormed forward. In Southern Jutland, Danish forces

concentrated on defending the main roads, but the troops were inferior in number and equipment, and had difficulty resisting. Danish soldiers on bikes and motorcycles could do little against the heavy guns and tanks of the Germans.

## WAR CAME TO COPENHAGEN

In many Danish coastal towns, German ships had been arriving since 04.15. In Gedser, the southernmost

*The Luftwaffe's newly developed Heinkel He 111 bomber flew over Denmark on 9th April 1940.*

## Danish soldiers up against a mighty force

The German army was big, well trained and modern; Danish forces were small, untrained and badly equipped.

A major reason why the Danish government chose to surrender just a few hours into the invasion was that the German war machine was far superior to that of the Danes. About 125 German bombers were ready to shell the largest Danish cities, and the Danish Air Force, with only six modern fighters, would have been unable to withstand the Luftwaffe or, indeed, the rest of the German armed forces.



### DANISH FORCES

**SOLDIERS:** 16,000 men

■ Of these, approximately 8,000 were recruits with only three months' training.

**TANKS:** 0

**\*AIR FORCE:** 21 fighter jets

■ Of these, only six were modern.  
27 reconnaissance aircraft  
19 training planes

**FLEET:** 2 artillery vessels

6 torpedo boats  
3 minelayers  
9 minesweepers  
4 inspection vessels  
7 submarines  
■ The fleet had over 22 aircraft.

\*Danish Army Air Corps in Værløse



### GERMAN INVASION FORCE

**SOLDIERS:** 38,000 men

**TANKS:** 70

**AIR FORCE:** 10 squadrons of bombers  
10 squadrons of fighter jets  
■ 250 aircraft available, 125 were ready for attack.

**FLEET:** 48 ships

■ Everything from transport ships and minesweepers to tugs and fishing trawlers.  
■ No warships participated, but a submarine assisted the ships at the Little Belt.

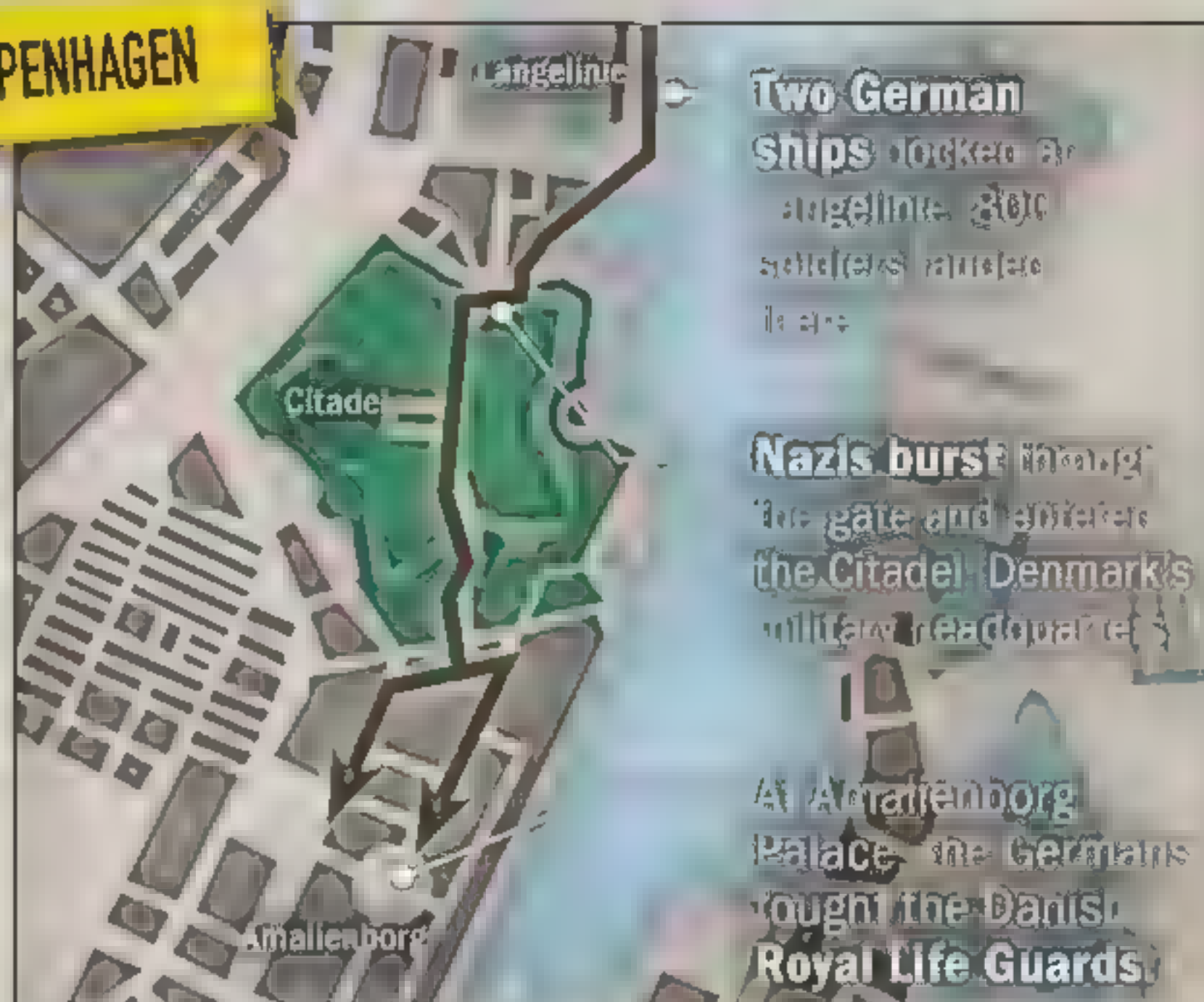
*An early attack on Værløse airbase ensured that no Danish fighter planes could oppose the Luftwaffe*



## BLITZKRIEG

## 800 MEN STORMED THE CAPITAL IN TWO HOURS

## COPENHAGEN



Two hours after the occupation forces' 800 men landed at Langelinie, the Danish government surrendered, and shortly afterwards, Danish forces ceased fighting.

**03.55** The guard at Fort Middelgrund observed two dark ships approaching Copenhagen. He would have fired warning shots, but the fort's gun didn't work.

**04.15** German ships arrive at Langelinie and 800 soldiers disembark. They occupy the Citadel.

**04.20** German envoy Cecil von Renthe-Fink briefs Foreign Minister Peter Munch about the occupation.

**05.00** At Amalienborg, King Christian X meets with Prime Minister Stauning and the army's chief among others.

**05.40** Several German patrols head from the Citadel towards the palace, where they are fought by the Royal Life Guards.

**06.00** The meeting at Amalienborg Palace ends with the decision to surrender. By 08.00, the order has reached all Danish army units.

Shortly after landing at Langelinie, German troops occupied the Citadel.

town in Denmark, the Nazis used cunning to get ashore unseen. One ship, the *Mecklenburg*, claimed to be a simple freight vessel, but hidden under its tarps were manned motor vehicles and a whole battalion of soldiers. As the gangway was lowered, the troops stormed out and advanced rapidly towards South Zealand.

Even in Copenhagen, entry was surprisingly unproblematic. Accompanied by an icebreaker, the passenger ship *Hansestadt Danzig*, which had served as a minelayer since 1939, passed Fort Middelgrund and the mines in the harbour without a hitch. The ship docked at Langelinie at 04.20. A machine gunner secured the quay, while 800 German infantrymen disembarked.

About half an hour later, they were at the Citadel, headquarters of the Danish Army. Here, the guards were surprised when the Nazis stormed both the South Gate and the North Gate. The Citadel was quickly taken by the German forces, who were amazed at how easy the operation had been.

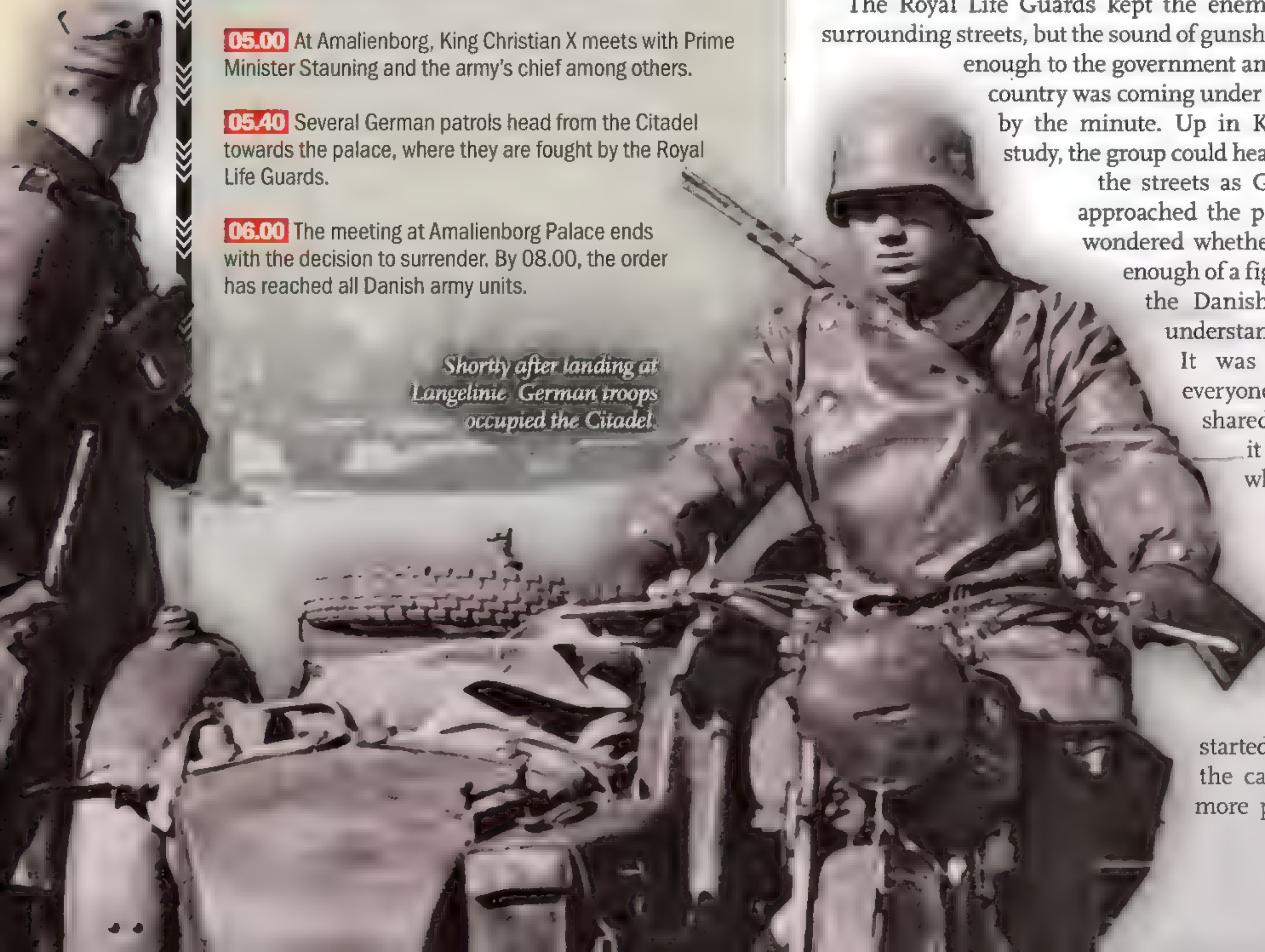
One German soldier later claimed that the Danes could have driven the invaders back into the water – if they hadn't been asleep at the time.

## LEAFLETS DROPPED OVER CITIES

The commander of the Danish Army, William Wain Prior, didn't face the invading Nazis, however. Just a few minutes before the attack, the general had left the Citadel to meet with King Christian X, Crown Prince Frederik, Prime Minister Stauning and other key ministers at Amalienborg Palace, where Germany's ultimatum was to be discussed. At 05.30, King Christian X was briefed on the serious situation, but no one at the meeting was in any doubt that it was impossible to prevent the occupation.

The Royal Life Guards kept the enemy at bay in the surrounding streets, but the sound of gunshots was evidence enough to the government and royals that the country was coming under greater pressure by the minute. Up in King Christian's study, the group could hear the fighting in the streets as German soldiers approached the palace. The king wondered whether they'd put up enough of a fight, and whether the Danish people would understand their decision. It was a doubt that everyone at the meeting shared, but in the end, it was only Prior who had difficulty accepting the decision.

Towards 06:00 – just a few short minutes after German bombers had started flying low over the capital to put yet more pressure on the







Loudspeakers announced that Denmark had surrendered and was now under German protection

decision makers – the surrender was announced and the king ordered the Royal Life Guards to cease fighting in the streets.

Without knowing what was happening in Copenhagen or the rest of the country, journalist Børge Outze and his wife were approaching Kolding. It was about 06.00.

A little outside the Jutland city, three Junkers flew overhead and continued at low altitude over the city rooftops, dropping square black parcels. At first, they looked like bombs, but the packs burst into bright swirls long before they reached the ground. In the calm, clear weather, pale green and pink leaflets fluttered down and settled on the city streets.

“Oprop!”, meaning proclamation, was emblazoned across the top of the flyer, which explained in an awkward mix of Norwegian and Danish that Germany had occupied Denmark to protect the country from a British attack. Therefore, the people and the army were urged to cease any resistance to the German troops, which had already “taken possession of the most important military targets in Denmark”.

The proclamation urged Danes to stay calm until the Danish government and Germany agreed on a way forward. The leaflets were dropped over the largest Danish cities before the German envoy received word of the government’s surrender.

#### AIRPORT BECAME GERMAN BASE

Leaflets were not the only things to descend from German aircraft on the morning of 9th April. In the first parachute attack in world

12

German armoured vehicles and three tanks, as well as one German bomber, were destroyed by Danish forces before the surrender took effect throughout the country.

## OPROP!

### Til Danmarks Soldater og Danmarks Folk!

Den Grund og det den tyske Regering og det tyske Folks oprigtige Ønske om at leve i Fred og Venskab med det danske og det franske Folk, har England og Frankrigs Magt-avere af 9. September erklæret Krig.

Dette Hænge- og Blad er en Meddelelse af den A. Regering på Kongens Befehl, som den har givet og derfor er det den danske Regering og Folket i det Hænge- og Blad at det danske Folk er blevet at være oprigtig stolt nok over det.

At den Grund har England, som det stadig er en af Danmarks og Norges Nærmeste og den A. Regering.

Den Grund er, at den Grund er en af Kongens Befehl, som den har givet og derfor er det den danske Regering og Folket i det Hænge- og Blad at det danske Folk er blevet at være oprigtig stolt nok over det. Den Grund er, at den Grund er en af Kongens Befehl, som den har givet og derfor er det den danske Regering og Folket i det Hænge- og Blad at det danske Folk er blevet at være oprigtig stolt nok over det.

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About 600,000 flyers written in a mixture of Danish and Norwegian and listing the Nazis' expectations were dropped over Danish cities from German aircraft.

history, German soldiers landed on Masnedø, between Zealand and Falster, to take control of the island’s fort.

The same manoeuvre took place at Aalborg Airport, which was the Germans’ main goal. The paratroopers met no resistance at the airport, a key gateway to Norway. Luftwaffe aircraft were now able to land and refuel on their way to the land of fjords, and on the first day of the occupation, the Germans flew 170,000 litres of petrol to Aalborg, which was, from that point, Germany’s northernmost airbase.

The huge Nazi presence surprised Børge Outze, who upon his arrival at the Little Belt Bridge, saw German ships lining the waterway. On the top of the bridge, soldiers sat with machine guns, looking like crows in treetops.

At that moment, the reporter knew there would never be a front line. He might as well travel back to the capital. Slowly, the reporter drove his car towards a machine gun post in front of the bridge, while



*The sight of the king on horseback in the streets of Copenhagen became a national focal point during the occupation of Denmark.*

King Christian X



Thorvald Stauning

*The swift surrender led to criticism of Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning, who had led Denmark safely through a crisis in the 1930s. Stauning died in spring 1942.*





*A five-øre, a two-øre and two one-øre coins – a total of nine øre – tied with red and white ribbons were worn by Danes in protest against 9th April.*

soldiers behind sandbags aimed their guns at him.

An officer stepped towards the car and inspected it for weapons. A hatbox in the back seat was examined, but everything checked out OK.

The husband and wife were greeted as friends by the officer, after he briefly explained to the couple that it had been necessary for Germany to occupy Denmark to prevent the British doing the same.

Børge Outze didn't feel friendly towards the soldiers who had invaded his country. On the Funen side of the strait, he could see where the German artillery had disembarked.

By 08.00, news of the surrender had reached most of Denmark, and at 08.30, the German proclamation was read out on state radio. About four hours after Operation Weserübung-Süd had begun, the fighting ended.

### **SIXTEEN DANES LOST THEIR LIVES**

Stauning and the other ministers maintained that they had done what they thought was best for the country. The reality was that the small Danish Army, with its limited equipment, had faced one of the world's strongest and most advanced

warring nations. An uneven fight with huge losses would have engulfed the country. Besides, Renthe-Fink had assured them that Germany did not intend "to destroy Denmark's territorial integrity and independence either at the present moment or in the future".

Had Denmark resisted, the nation would have risked losing any kind of independent government during the occupation. And the country's biggest cities would have been bombed. For some Danes, that was reason enough to accept the decision.

On the day in question, however, Denmark was afflicted with deep sorrow. The sound of marching Nazi boots was heard in every city, and for the first time, the whole country was occupied by a foreign power.

The swift surrender had kept the number of deaths down to 16, with 23 injured. The number of German fatalities is unknown, but a senior SS officer reported after the liberation that over 180 men were lost. In addition, 12 armoured cars, three tanks and one bomber were destroyed.

For Børge Outze, it felt strange driving towards his workplace in Copenhagen as night fell on 9th April. The city was darker than usual, because the Germans had demanded that the Danes black out their homes to avoid air raids.

When Outze, exhausted, finally reached the editorial office, his colleagues at the *Nationaltidende* told him they'd thought he was dead. Updated on the events of the day, the reality sank in for Outze. Sometime later he lamented Denmark's fate:

"We have Nazism, we have the Gestapo and concentration camps, traitors and overlords – the war was over in a single day! Now we live in the shadow of the Gestapo and Sachsenhausen [concentration camp near Berlin]."

### **PERSPECTIVE**

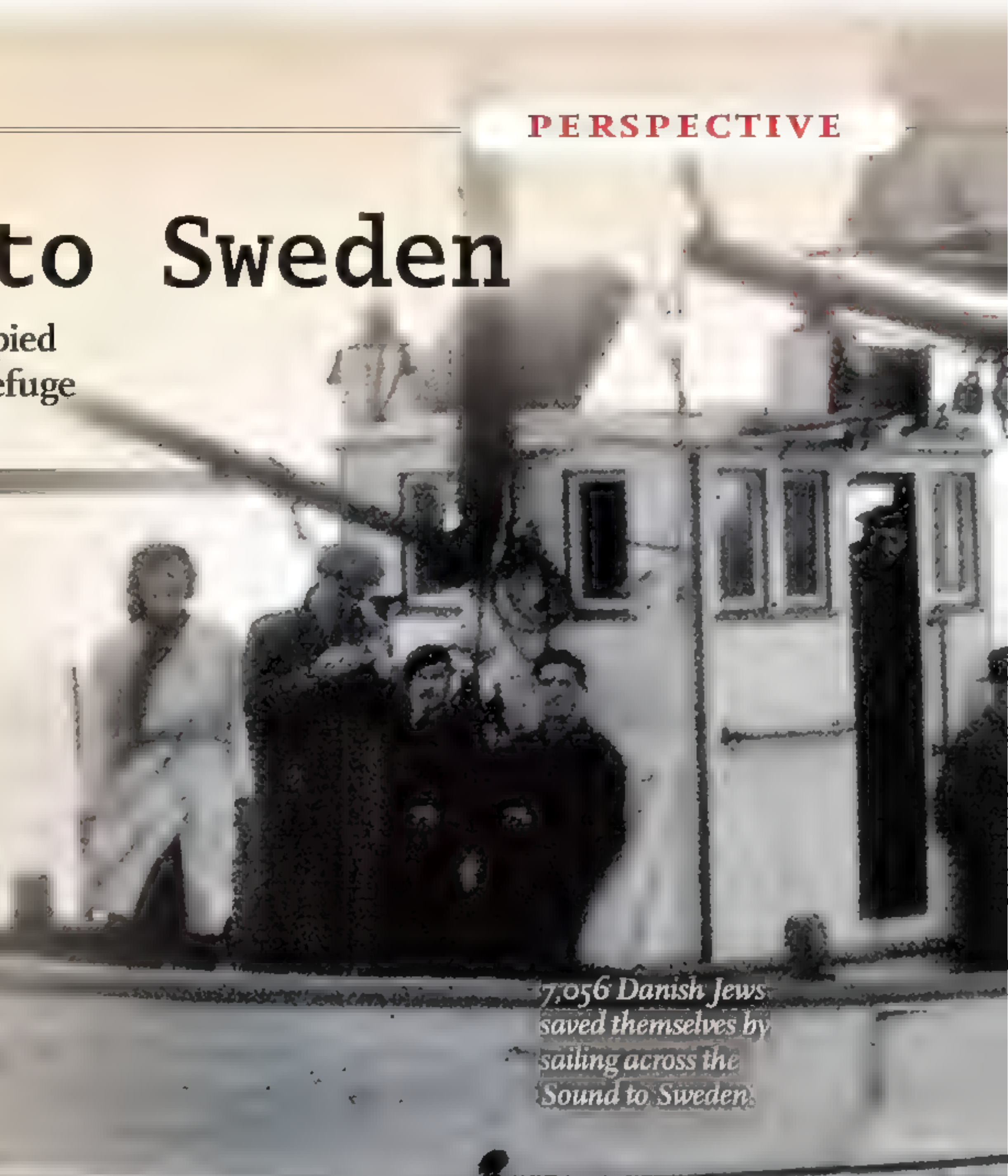
## **Refugees fled to Sweden**

As the only Scandinavian country to avoid being occupied during World War II, Sweden became an important refuge for people fleeing neighbouring nations.

The Swedish policy of neutrality meant that Sweden, being free, became a safe haven for people persecuted by the Nazis. This was especially beneficial to Danish Jews. On 29th August, 1943, the Danish government resigned. As a consequence, the Germans began hunting down Danish Jews on 1st October.

But before the hunt started in earnest, the Jewish community was warned, and the majority of Danish Jews chose to respond immediately. Between 28th September and 3rd October, 1943, at least 871 refugees reached safety on the other side of the Sound. In total, 7,056 Danish Jews – 90 percent of all Jews in Denmark – managed to escape over the border.

In Norway, the registration of Jews began just weeks after the occupation, and the first ones were sent to concentration camps in November 1942. Only about 1,000 Norwegian Jews out of 2,100 were saved by escaping through the wilderness to Sweden.



*7,056 Danish Jews saved themselves by sailing across the Sound to Sweden.*



*German infantrymen land at Oslo Airport, which was captured by the Nazis early on the morning of 9th April. It later served as a German military base.*



# 1940

9<sup>TH</sup> APRIL





5 BATTLE FOR NARVIK 5

# NORWAY FALLS

In 1940, Hitler decided to test the Allies' strength during the invasion of Norway. However, after a month of hard fighting in and around the crucial port city of Narvik, the Germans were ready to admit defeat and retreat home through Sweden, but then the Allies did something unexpected...



## THE STAGE IS SET



The Nazis believe that Britain's sea blockade was one of the reasons Germany lost World War I. Free access to the North Atlantic is crucial if history isn't to repeat itself. Norway seems to be the key: if captured, its fjords could be used for U-boat bases while control of Narvik would secure the iron ore supply from Sweden.



ON 9TH APRIL 1940, THE ARMoured SHIPS *Eidsvold* and *Norge* lay at anchor off Narvik. They were Norway's strongest warships – but also the oldest employed by any of the world's navies.

All at once, a slender, grey vessel slipped out of the darkness. Then another, and more followed. A total of ten state-of-the-art German destroyers sailed across the Ofotfjord towards Narvik, directly opposite the two old armoured colossuses.

The German flagship *Heidkamp* sent a boat across to *Eidsvold*. The Germans were friends, the newcomers claimed. They urged the Norwegians to stand down, but *Eidsvold*'s captain, Odd Willoch, wasn't fooled and sent the German party on its way. As the German boat headed back, it sent up a red flare indicating the Norwegians planned to resist.

Willoch knew what was coming next:

"Now we are going to fight, boys," he shouted.

The old armoured ship slowly turned towards the German destroyer, increasing its speed. But before *Eidsvold* could approach ramming speed, three German torpedoes hit the

Norwegian ship. Two did little damage, but the third found its mark near the forward magazine, which exploded, tearing the hull apart. *Eidsvold* sank in just 15 seconds. 175 sailors out of the 183 that made up the ship's crew died in the icy water.

The explosion was heard on the armoured ship *Norge*. From the deck, her crew watched unknown ships emerge from the fog, then *Norge* opened fire. None of the shells struck, but two torpedoes from the German destroyer *Arnim* hit *Norge* amidships. One minute later, *Norge* had joined *Eidsvold*, disappearing from the surface with 101 sailors.

With the sinking of the armoured ships, Narvik's naval resistance was over. The commander-in-chief of the city's defence was Colonel Konrad Sundlo – a member of *Nasjonal Samling*, a Nazi-style party in Norway's National Assembly. He dithered for half-an-hour without attacking, which gave the Germans plenty of time to gain control of the port city.

The Germans entered Narvik without a shot being fired, and *Heidkamp*'s commander, Friedrich Bonte, was pleased to note that his part in the large-scale operation codenamed





Weserübung was complete: Narvik – the port that was vital for transporting Swedish iron ore to Germany – was secure.

### THE ATTACK CAME AS A SURPRISE

In the weeks before Operation Weserübung, rumours of an imminent German attack circulated, but no one had taken them seriously. Even when the largest German naval force ever assembled left northern Germany on the night of 7th April, neither the Scandinavians nor the Allies had any idea what was about to happen. Was it an attack on Iceland? Murmansk? Or just an exercise? The guesses were all way off the mark.

At 04.15 on 9th April, the Germans attacked a number of strategically important cities, port facilities and bridges in Denmark and Norway. The surprise was total. In just four hours, Germany had forced Denmark to surrender and declare itself willing to cooperate with the new occupying power.

The Nazis were hoping for a similar outcome in Norway, but instead of negotiating, King Håkon and his government fled to Oslo and mobilised the army.

General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst, the commander of the giant Operation Weserübung, knew that a fight was now unavoidable. Norway had to be taken, valley by valley, until its inhabitants realised the futility of the situation.

The Norwegians defended staunchly, but their options were limited. The soldiers lacked both training and equipment. The country wasn't prepared for an invasion. The troops' only hope was that the Allies would come to Norway's rescue – which, after some disagreement, they were on their way to do.

### THE ALLIES PREPARE FOR ACTION

On 14th April, the first British troops landed in the Harstad region, north of Narvik, where they set up a temporary base. The soldiers had no artillery or anti-aircraft guns. Nor were

they prepared for the Norwegian conditions, having neither warm clothes, snowshoes nor skis. When the Royal Navy's Admiral of the Fleet Lord Cork went ashore to assess the situation, he sank so deeply into the snow that his men had to pull him out. In his report he wrote:

"I have personally tested [the snow]... and found it easy to sink to one's waist and to make, any progress was exhausting."

Despite the problems, it was decided to try and force a landing at Narvik on 24th April, but the action ended in chaos. On the day of the offensive, a violent blizzard struck. The British battleships fired several salvos, but couldn't see where their shells were landing because of the blinding snow. The British had no choice but to abort the landing – which was just as well as their shells had done little damage to the German positions.

The city residential sector, on the other hand, had been hit square on. Four days after the unsuccessful landing attempt on 24th April, the two British commanders quarrelled about the

best way to proceed. Lord Cork, confident in the Royal Navy's strength, wanted to attempt a new frontal assault on Narvik, but Major-General Pierse Joseph Mackesy, the commander of the land forces, was more cautious. He wanted to use the army to surround Narvik. On 28th April, reinforcements finally arrived under the command of French General Antoine Béthouart. He was a World War I veteran and an expert on mountain warfare. With him he had three battalions of eager Alpine troops and two Foreign Legion battalions.

General Béthouart proposed a compromise. According to his plan, the Allies would land their troops at the lightly defended village of Bjerkvik, from where they would move south to attack the German flank at Narvik. At the same time, units of exiled Polish soldiers would converge on the position from the south-west, while Norwegian troops moved in from the north-east. The Royal Navy would

## "Against whom?"

King Håkon's reaction when he was awakened and informed that Norway was at war.



*German soldiers shelter behind a Panzer I tank in case they run into a Norwegian-manned machine-gun nest.*



# Operation Weserübung

Nazi Germany devoted almost its entire fleet to the invasion of Denmark and Norway. The bold campaign involved troops on the coast without the British Royal Navy discovering them. The offensive, codenamed Operation Weserübung, was launched at 04.15 on 9th April 1940. Denmark surrendered after a few hours of fighting, but in Norway, the resistance was far more stubborn.

**[8]**

## Sweden agrees to Nazi demands

While Denmark and Norway are occupied, Sweden is allowed to remain free, providing it does not support its neighbours and continues exporting iron ore to Germany.

• TROMSØ

• HARSTAD

LOFOTEN

• NARVIK

Parts of the British fleet

British minefield

**[7]**

## Treason in Narvik

At 04.15, the German navy sets out for Narvik. The fleet includes two battleships and ten destroyers. The Germans quickly sink Norway's old armoured ships *Eidsvold* and *Norge* and land around 2,000 soldiers. The city's commander – a member of a Norwegian Nazi party – quickly abandons the defence.

**[6]**

## The Royal Navy makes way for Nazis

During Operation Weserübung, the British have a large naval presence in the waters off Narvik, where they are laying mines. But instead of defending the city, the British sail out along the Lofoten, allowing the Germans to sneak past unnoticed. A communication breakdown is blamed for the Royal Navy's uncoordinated movements.

**[5]**

## Trondheim is defenceless

The German navy plans to enter Trondheim through the fjord. With just a hundred soldiers, they succeed in occupying the city and airport, which will be used to supply the German forces at Narvik in the weeks to come.

• NAMSØS



#### 4 Bergen fights back

As the German ships reach the entrance to Bergen, the Norwegians open fire. Three German ships are hit, but the battle is over quickly. The Germans land around 1,900 soldiers.

#### 3 Stukas attack Stavanger

German Stukas sink the Norwegian destroyer Ager, which is trying to defend Stavanger. The town is occupied by a company of paratroopers. Soon after, aircraft from Aalborg land with reinforcements and equipment.

#### 2 Denmark falls after four hours

At 04.15 German ships land soldiers in seven Danish port cities. At the same time, soldiers cross the border into Southern Jutland. At Falster, 96 paratroopers occupy the Storstrøms bridge. Two hours later, the Germans take their real goal in Denmark: Aalborg Airport. Paratroopers assume control of the airport, and by 07.00 the first German aircraft are landing there before heading on to Norway. Shortly after 08.00, Denmark surrenders. 16 Danes have died. German losses are unknown.

#### 1 Operation Weserübung begins

In the first days of April 1940, German freighters sail north. They are loaded with supplies for the German troops, which will soon invade Danish and Norwegian ports. A few days later, the German fleet sets out. In Northern Germany, the army and air force is preparing for action. On 9th April at 04.15 the operation begins as German tanks roll across the border from Denmark.

#### Antique guns sink German cruiser

- At 04.15: Oslo's airport, Fornebu, is occupied by 68 men.
- At 04.20: Oslo's German ambassador informs Foreign Minister Halvdan Koht of the attack – and demands Norway's surrender. Koht passes the message to the government, who rejects the German demands.
- At 04.21: German cruiser *Blücher* fired upon in the Oslo Fjord.
- At 04.25: Germany's ambassador in Oslo is told that Norway will not surrender. "Then there will be fighting and nothing can save you," says the ambassador. "The fight is already in progress," replies Norwegian Foreign Minister Koht.
- At 07.30: King Håkon and the government are evacuated by a special train.

- 1 *Blücher* leads the German fleet towards Oslo. The coastal battery in Husvik opens fire.
- 2 Oscarsborg's guns hit *Blücher*. The other ships land their troops 10 km further south.
- 3 The torpedo battery at Karholmen hits *Blücher*.
- 4 The German cruiser sinks with the loss of 830 lives.







NAME

## CARL GUSTAV FLEISCHER

TITLE | COMMANDER OF THE NORWEGIAN FORCES

### Narvik's hero committed suicide

At Narvik, Fleischer became the first Allied general to inflict a real defeat on the Germans. On 7th June 1940, he left the country with King Håkon. When the exiled government appointed a new commander in 1942, Fleischer felt disgraced and took his own life.

- Critic of Norwegian disarmament.
- Side-lined by the exiled government.



1883-1942



NAME

## JOSEF TERBOVEN

TITLE | REICH COMMISSIONER IN NORWAY

### Hitler's bully in Norway

During the occupation, Josef Terboven terrorised the Norwegians, instigating Jewish persecution, issuing death sentences against suspected saboteurs and ordering vengeful mass shootings. He was despised by the people, and barely less so by the German military, but as he was answerable only to Hitler, he was untouchable.

- Committed Nazi.
- Blew himself up in May 1945.



1898-1945

bombard the Germans at Narvik directly. Both British commanders approved the plan and preparations for the Battle of Narvik began.

### THE WAR RAGED IN THE MOUNTAINS

Further inland, around 10,000 Norwegian soldiers were attempting to hold back the German invaders, but every day, the Germans received new supplies from the air, helping them to capture large areas to the north and east of Narvik.

On 16th April, the Germans attacked the Norwegian positions at Bjørnfjell, near the Swedish border. Their goal

was to secure the Malmabanen railway, which carried iron ore from Sweden. The Norwegians held them for a few hours, but when the Germans attacked with a 20-mm, rapid-fire gun, the Norwegian defence collapsed and Bjørnfjell was lost.

The Norwegians were exhausted and also suffered from a lack of training, heavy equipment and air support, but adversity soon hardened them. Under the leadership of General Carl Gustav Fleischer, they began to become accustomed to the soldier's life and learned to take advantage of being on home ground, using their local knowledge and skills to great effect. Soon, the Norwegians were able to match the highly trained German Alpine troops, and by the beginning of May they began to slowly advance towards Narvik. The Germans resisted, but the Norwegians cleared them from every mountain top.

On 7th May, the Norwegian soldiers captured the strategically important Hill 856. From there, they could look down to the Ofotfjord. And in the distance, lights flashed from a city: Narvik.

### BJERKVIK DROWNS IN BLOOD

Just before midnight on 12th May, General Béthouart was standing on the deck of the cruiser *HMS Effingham*. Together with 14 other ships, the vessel glided over the quiet Beis Fjord. In the light of the late evening sun, the Frenchman watched four landing craft with nearly 500 men from the Foreign Legion approach the town of Bjerkvik. Once the vessels were close to land, Béthouart gave the order to open fire: "Tiré!" The shockwave from the gun's firing ripped the cigarette out of his mouth. A few seconds later, the shells crashed into Bjerkvik. One of the first buildings to be hit was the church. The Germans had been using it as an ammunition store, and the building exploded in flames. The fire spread quickly to the wooden houses, which were located throughout Bjerkvik.

The Legionnaires stormed ashore. The soldiers' briefing had claimed that the town was empty of civilians, but as Corporal Charles Favrel discovered, that wasn't true:

"A frightful butchery ensued, in the course of which we slaughtered more civilians than Germans. Machine guns riddled the doors and windows... then the infantrymen rushed forward hurling grenades... With rifle in hand, I was to scour a dreadful Calvary strewn with mangled corpses,

## ALLIES COULD HAVE WON

### FIVE MONTHS OF BATTLES

# 1940

#### 16TH FEBRUARY Brits storm German tanker

British board German ship *Altmark* in Norwegian waters. Around 300 British prisoners are rescued. Hitler loses faith in Norwegian neutrality.

#### 29TH FEBRUARY Operation Weserübung

German General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst presents his plan for the invasion of Denmark and Norway. Hitler approves the plan, Operation Weserübung, the following day.

#### 10TH APRIL

##### First naval battle

During Operation Weserübung, Germany sends half its destroyers to Narvik. Before sailing home, the British Royal Navy enters the harbour and sinks several of them.

#### 11TH APRIL


Germans take more General Falkenhorst receives

The Allies were given plenty of chances to prevent Germany's capture of Norway, but their efforts were hampered by mismanagement, indecision and a lack of heavy equipment.

*German invasion forces faced strong resistance in Northern Norway.*







The Germans destroyed the port of Narvik on 28th May, while the Allies blasted the ore-carrying Malmabanen railway line just before they evacuated on 7th June.

cradles overturned on dead babies, and the wounded moaning in pools of blood."

Béthouart sent the Foreign Legion's motorcycle troops south at high speed. From the west, Polish troops advanced and two British destroyers were ready with artillery support. But it all proved unnecessary. The German troops had fled from the inferno in Bjerkevik, and the Legionaries were able to reach Øyjord, the gateway to Narvik, without meeting any resistance. Narvik was now surrounded.

#### CHURCHILL BACKS OFF

On the 15th May, Britain's newly appointed prime minister, Winston Churchill, was woken by a phone call. As he lifted the receiver, he heard the French prime minister, Paul Reynaud, on the other end: "We have been defeated," the Frenchman said, strain obvious in his voice. When Churchill didn't reply, he continued. "We are beaten; we have lost the battle."

Five days earlier, Germany had launched Hitler's long-planned lightning attack on the Netherlands, Belgium and

France. The border had been crossed by 157 armoured divisions and it seemed that nothing could stop the German advance. The Allies were on the run across the entire front, and all of a sudden, the distant battle for Narvik, was no longer a priority for the Allies.

On 23rd May, the War Cabinet in London discussed a report from the Chiefs of Staff. It recommended that Narvik be captured, and then immediately evacuated. The Allies feared taking heavy losses if the Germans discovered they were withdrawing, so they planned to use the assault on Narvik to cover their escape.

The next day in Norway, Lord Cork received his orders. They stressed that the withdrawal must

be kept secret from the Norwegians at all costs. The British thought the Norwegians might immediately surrender if they learned of the Allies' new objective. If that happened, the Allies would lose their rearguard for the retreat.

"The worst of it all is the need for lying to all and sundry in order to preserve secrecy. The situation

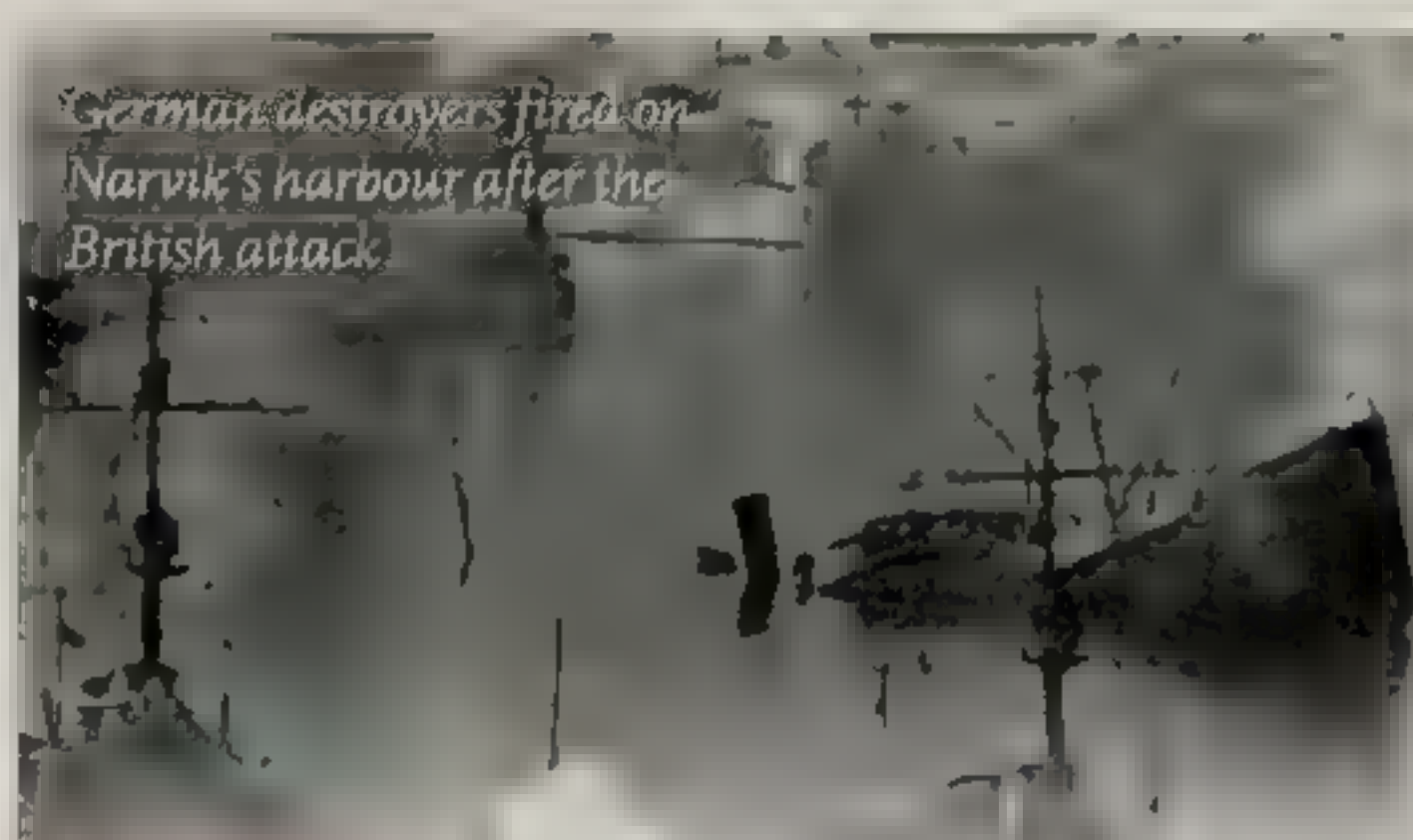
## "Give something up as lost only when it is lost"

General Alfred Jodl's response when Hitler revealed he was ready to cede Narvik.

reinforcements and begins to occupy the area around the Oslo Fjord. He then sends troops to the cities of Lillehammer and Trondheim.

#### 12TH APRIL Faroe Islands occupied

British troops occupy the Danish Faroe Islands to prevent the Germans from setting up a naval base there.



#### 13TH APRIL

##### Second naval Battle of Narvik

The Royal Navy returns and sinks the remainder of the ten German destroyers. In Narvik, 2,000 German soldiers fear the British will try to occupy the city.

#### 14TH APRIL Hitler is ready to withdraw

During a meeting with his general staff, Hitler suggests that the Germans abandon Narvik. One of Hitler's closest advisers manages to persuade him to hold on.

#### 14TH APRIL Allies land soldiers

The first Allied soldiers are landed at

Harstad in Northern Norway. They are part of Rupert Force, whose objective is to take back Narvik.

#### 16TH APRIL British move towards Trondheim

Allied soldiers from Maurice Force go ashore at Namsos. Their goal is to free Trondheim, but much of their equipment hasn't arrived. After a

week, the corps is forced to give up its mission and return.

#### 18TH APRIL Allied landing in Åndalsnes

Primrose Force arrives at Åndalsnes and takes the train to Dombås. Together with Maurice Force, its goal is to free Trondheim, but German resistance proves too strong.





A British newspaper seller announces the German invasion of Norway on 9th April 1940.

vis-a-vis the Norwegians is particularly difficult and one feels a most despicable creature in pretending that we are going on fighting, when we are going to quit at once," British General Auchinleck wrote.

### THE GERMANS LEAVE NARVIK

The final assault on Narvik began at midnight on 28th May. It was vital that the first soldiers landed in Narvik unseen so that a bridgehead could be established. The crossing took place in silence. Only once the vessels were close to shore was a red flare launched to signal the start of the Royal Navy's bombardment of the German positions. At first, the British soldiers advanced easily, but the situation soon changed.

Two of the attackers' tanks got stuck in mud on the beach. Norwegian and French troops became mixed up in the chaos of battle and all met with strong resistance. One group of German soldiers entrenched themselves in a tunnel, which

was only cleared when Legionaries positioned a gun at the tunnel's mouth and opened fire.

Eventually Narvik's German commander, Major Haussel, had only 400 men left. After just over seven hours of fighting – at 06.50 on 28th May – Haussel ordered a retreat from Narvik; the Allied soldiers arrived in the afternoon.

"Everyone lined the streets and cheered and we waved little French, English and Polish flags that the women had secretly sewn during the German occupation", the city's mayor recalled.

After Narvik's fall, it seemed only a matter of time before the Nazis were pushed out of Northern Norway. They were squeezed into a small area of Bjørnfjell, near the border, and the

Norwegian 6th Division was moving ever closer.

The Germans, recognising their impending defeat, had several trains waiting to evacuate their troops. But just as the Norwegians were fighting to clear Bjørnfjell, the Allies began evacuating their forces from the coast. By the time the Norwegians were ready to finish the Germans off, it was already too late. The final storming of Bjørnfjell should have taken place on 8th June, but it never came. The Norwegian government had met for the last time in Norway the day before and decided that the situation was futile.

On 9th June, the last Allied soldiers left Norway. On the same day, the Norwegian troops were ordered to disband to avoid being taken captive. The undefeated soldiers swapped their uniforms for civilian clothes. The mood in the ranks was at rock-bottom.

Narvik was in ruins. Stray donkeys wandered around the charred remains. The animals had been left behind when the Allies evacuated the city. Many of them had served with the Foreign Legion in the scorched lands of North Africa. Now they had been abandoned under Norway's midnight sun.

**"I survived and maintained my position... while all the blame was thrown on poor Mr Chamberlain"**

Winston Churchill on the failed Narvik campaign.

## 1940

Instead the corps continues by train to Lillehammer to relieve the Norwegians there.

### 23RD APRIL

**Primrose wiped out**  
Primrose Force has fought through the Gudbrandsdalen, but the soldiers are inexperienced, and at the town of Tretten, the corps is virtually

obliterated by the Germans.

### 28TH APRIL

**South Norway lost**  
The Allies decide to abandon Southern Norway and evacuate its surviving forces. Some soldiers fleeing the battle near Tretten commandeered trucks and drive to the coast. Others sneak across the border to Sweden on foot.

### 29TH APRIL

**The Germans bomb the Molde**  
The king and his government have to leave Molde. Tromsø is their new HQ.

### 2ND AND 3RD MAY

**Allied evacuation**  
Stukas attack the remnants of Primrose and Maurice Force as they sail away. A French and a British destroyer are sunk. Southern Norway is in German hands.

### 10TH MAY

**Hitler opens the Western Front**  
The Nazis invade the Netherlands and

Belgium, bypassing the French Maginot line between Germany and France. On the same day, Neville Chamberlain resigns; the new British prime minister is Winston Churchill.

### 28TH MAY

**Narvik is liberated**  
Troops from Norway, France, Britain and Poland capture the port city of Narvik.

### 7TH JUNE

**Narvik is abandoned**  
Nazis are ready to cede Northern Norway when suddenly the Allied forces leave Narvik.

### 9TH JUNE

**Norway is lost**  
Norwegian soldiers lay down their arms. The king and government have already left aboard a British naval vessel.



# Norway was treated more harshly than Denmark

While Denmark initially cooperated with the Germans and retained its own government, Norway immediately came under German rule. On the other hand, the Danes began to resist as early as 1941, much earlier than the Norwegians.

## Norway was ruled by Nazis

Initially, Norway was ruled by a council under the German ambassador, Curt Bräuer. Then Reich commissioner Josef Terboven took control until 1st February 1942, after which Norwegian Nazi sympathiser Vidkun Quisling led a puppet government.

After 9th April, government continued as normal in Denmark – at least on paper. Although formally classed as

independent and neutral, this was conditional on the government agreeing to cooperate fully with the Germans.

Nasjonal Samling was a Norwegian Nazi Party.

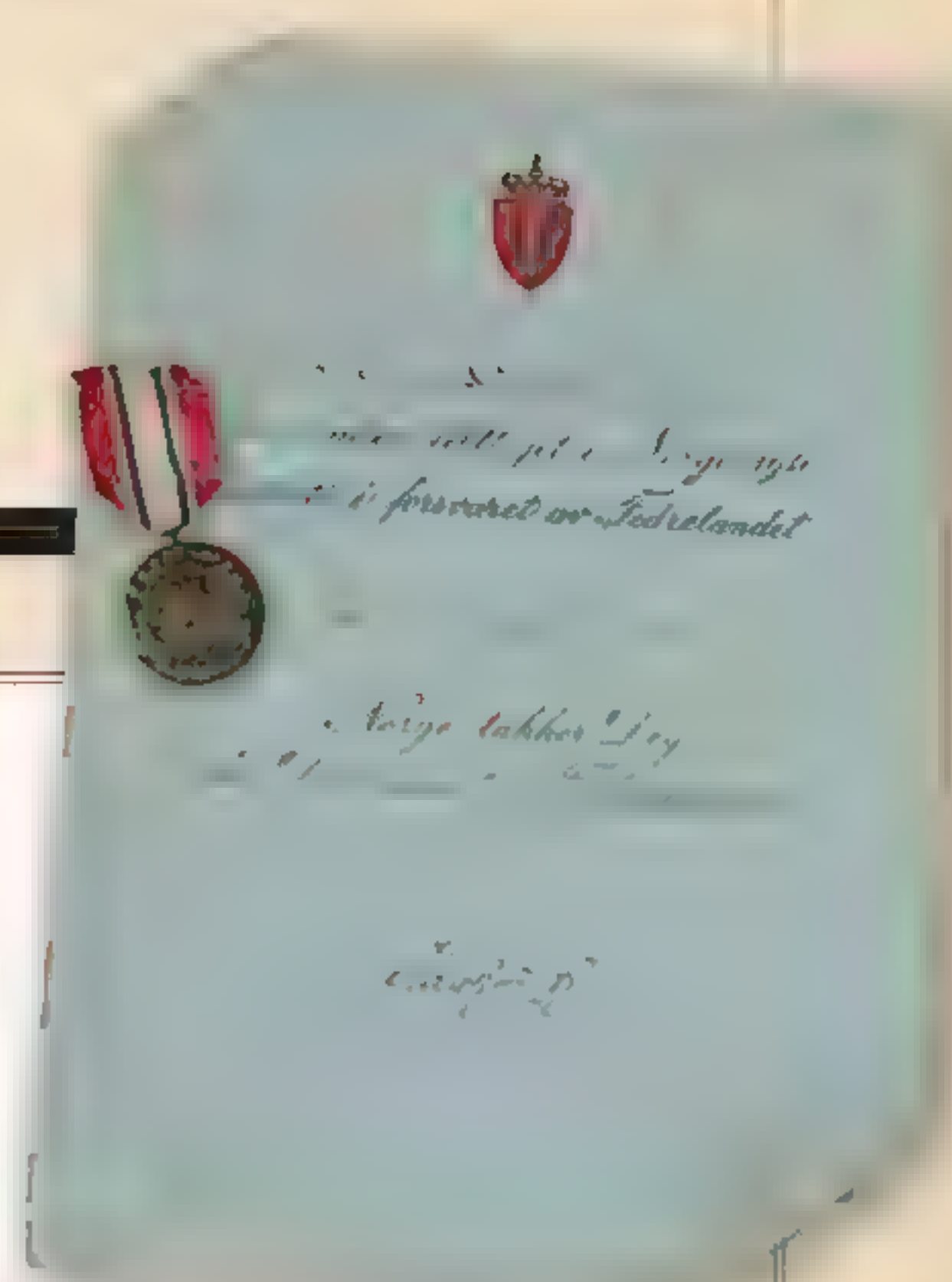


## Danes cooperated

Throughout the occupation, the Norwegians offered passive resistance. They defied attempts to put Nazis in positions of leadership within their church and cultural life or allow Nazi ideology to become the norm.

Initially, the Danes accepted the German occupation, but that changed when the Nazis were defeated in the Battle of Britain in 1940. The Danes began to show passive resistance and later instigated more open forms of rebellion. By August 1943, popular resistance was so pronounced that the Danish government had to abandon any pretence at cooperation when it refused to sanction the death penalty for acts of sabotage.

Norwegians who defended their country received medals after the war.



## Norwegians avoided armed rebellion

The Norwegian government in exile in Britain asked the Norwegians to avoid participating in acts of sabotage or violent resistance for fear that it would provoke even greater oppression. The recommendation was widely followed: apart from the last six months of the war, Norwegian resistance groups practiced only limited sabotage.

Only after 22nd June 1941 did Denmark have a notable resistance movement. When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union on that day, Danish Communists initiated an armed rebellion. Soon, civic groups also joined the action. Despite their political differences, the various resistance groups cooperated well.

## Victims of war

 **10,262**

Norwegians perished during the war:  
3,638 sailors, c. 2,000 soldiers, 2,091 resistance operatives, c. 1,850 civilians, 689 on the Eastern Front and 610 Jews.

 **10,433**

Danes perished during the war:  
2,685 civilians, 2,000 sailors, 600 in camps, 400 German workers, 63 in Allied service and c. 2,000 on the Eastern Front.

Armbands were worn in 1945 by the resistance.



On 11th May 1945, the Norwegian resistance group Milorg took Akershus Fortress from the Germans.







LIGHTNING ATTACK ON BELGIUM

# ELITE SOLDIERS CAPTURE BELGIAN FORT

On the morning of 10th May 1940, German gliders land on the top of Belgium's strongest fortress, Eben-Emael. Ten minutes later, the fort's guns have been blown to pieces and the way is clear for the invasion of France.

1940

10<sup>TH</sup> MAY





*The guns at Fort Eben-Emael were destroyed, leaving the three bridges needed for the Germans' invasion undefended.*



## THE STAGE IS SET



The German war machine is rolling towards France, but a major obstacle stands in its way. The Belgian fort of Eben-Emael guards the bridges over the River Meuse and Albert Canal, which the Germans must cross to capture Western Europe. The fort must therefore be taken – even if the task seems impossible.



**T**HE GLIDER'S CANVAS CREAKED AND FLUTTERED. Eight men sat huddled together on the narrow bench in the middle of the fuselage. They shared the small space with ammunition belts, machine guns and flame-throwers. Clamped along the side were the new explosives that German scientists had spent over a year developing. Soon they would be put to the test.

Through the morning mist the pilot could make out the outline of the Belgian bunker system. He gave a signal, and the men in the plane tightened their grip for landing. The glider bumped over the grass, its cabin shaking uncontrollably before the parachute brake took effect. With a judder, the plane stopped and stood completely silent on the shorn grass. All around the glider were huge gun turrets. Below, in the underground bunker, around a thousand Belgian soldiers slept on.

Sergeant Hans Niedermeier immediately grabbed an explosive, jumped out and stormed the gun's position as he'd been taught during

training in Czechoslovakia. It was 05.50 on Friday, 10th May 1940. The attack on Eben-Emael was under way.

### HITLER PLANNED A SPECIAL OPERATION

Seven months earlier in October 1939, Major General Kurt Student, head of Germany's airborne and air-landing troops, marched into a small walnut-panelled room in Berlin. At the end of the room, the Führer stood behind a large desk studying a detailed map.

The meeting between Hitler and the general was short. The Führer pointed to the Belgian fort of Eben-Emael on the map and asked whether it was possible to land gliders on its top when the invasion of France, Belgium and the Netherlands began. Student asked for a day to find out and report back.

No soldier had ever attacked with gliders – and never such a highly fortified and largely impenetrable fortress. On the other hand, Student was convinced of his paratroopers' abilities. The next day, he returned to confirm that his soldiers could carry out the task – but only in daylight.

The general's word was enough for Hitler, who had personally formulated the attack plan for the most important fort in Belgium, Eben-Emael. A paratrooper unit needed to neutralise the Belgian concrete fortress before its heavy guns



*The German elite soldiers trained for six months to disable the fort's defences with maximum efficiency.*



## SHAPED CHARGES

# New explosive cleared way

During the attack On Eben-Emael German forces used shaped-charged explosives for the first time – to devastating effect.

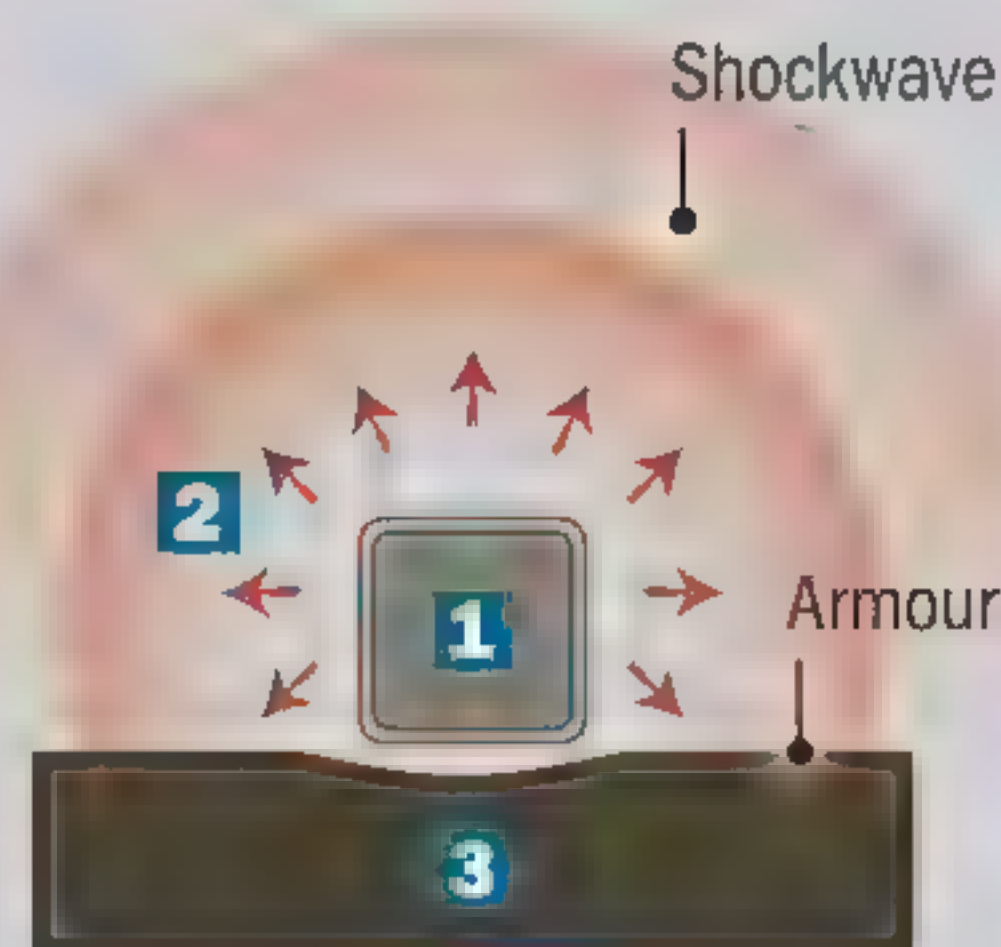
Eben-Emael's thick walls were penetrated by a new specially designed German weapon: shaped-charges.

During World War I, French concrete bunkers had survived everything that was thrown at them – even withstanding non-stop bombardments by German guns.

Hitler therefore demanded an explosive that could take a bunker out of action with a single blast.

He ordered German scientists to work in secret on developing a more efficient form of explosive. The new shaped charges they created focused the blast in one direction.

The result was a destructive shockwave that could penetrate both armour and concrete. The principle behind these shaped charges is still used today in all artillery guns.



### Common explosive charge

- 1 The explosive charge is encased in a metal shell.
- 2 The explosion is equally powerful in every direction.
- 3 Armour and concrete absorb the blast directed towards them.



Shaped-charged explosives were used in 1944 in the German panzerfaust, which could blast through tanks.



### Shaped explosive charge

- 1 The explosive is located at the end of the charge.
- 2 The cavity is filled with air.
- 3 When triggered, all the explosive's force is channelled through the cavity in a single direction - maximising the blast.

slowed the German advance into Belgium. The gliders were part of a bigger plan, however, one that involved additional paratroopers securing three key bridges over the River Meuse and Albert Canal, which marked the Belgian border.

### SOLDIERS TRAINED FOR SIX MONTHS

In November 1939, training began for 85 selected paragliders. The unit was codenamed Group Granite and divided into 11 smaller groups. Over the next six months they underwent intensive training, which was later moved to Czechoslovakia. There, the paratroopers landed again and again on a faithful reproduction of Eben-Emael built into the Beneš Wall, the border fortifications begun by the Czechs prior to their occupation. During the spring, Granite's pilots practised the gliders' approach and landing to perfection.

At the same time, German scientists researched a new type of explosive with shaped charges. The weapons project was so secret that the group was not allowed to train with the new explosives. Instead, it used dummy versions to perfect their attack on the fort's machine-gun posts and heavy artillery.

The training continued until the groups could land and reach their targets within the one-kilometre-square complex in under ten minutes. In early April 1940, Group Granite was called back to Germany.

*Fall Gelb* (Operation Yellow) – the German invasion of Holland, Belgium and France – was imminent.

### PILOTS MADE EMERGENCY LANDINGS

Early in the morning of 10th May 1940, 11 Stuka bombers left the Ostheim airbase near Cologne, each one towing a DFS 230 glider connected to it by

over a hundred metres of steel wire. Group Granite was on board. Things went wrong shortly after its departure. Two of the planes became caught up in the tow ropes. The two pilots cut the wires immediately, and the gliders began a fast descent. Unfortunately, the raid's leader, Lieutenant Rudolf Witzig, was in one of them.

After an emergency landing near Cologne, Witzig leaped out of the glider and sprinted in the dawn light over the fields before stealing a bicycle and later requisitioning a car. Crushed by the prospect of his men being defeated, the lieutenant continued at furious speed towards the Ostheim airfield where he collected a parachute while a ground crew prepared a new Stuka and DFS 230.

Four hours later, a relieved Witzig was with the group again. But by the time his glider landed at Eben-Emael at 08.00, the initial raid was long finished.

### GLIDERS FLOATED SILENTLY ACROSS BELGIUM

As the orders stated, the pilots in the other aircraft were still travelling westward – led from the ground by lit flares.

After flying for exactly 73 kilometres, the pilots on the Stukas released the gliders, 27 kilometres from Eben-Emael at an altitude of 2.6 kilometres. The

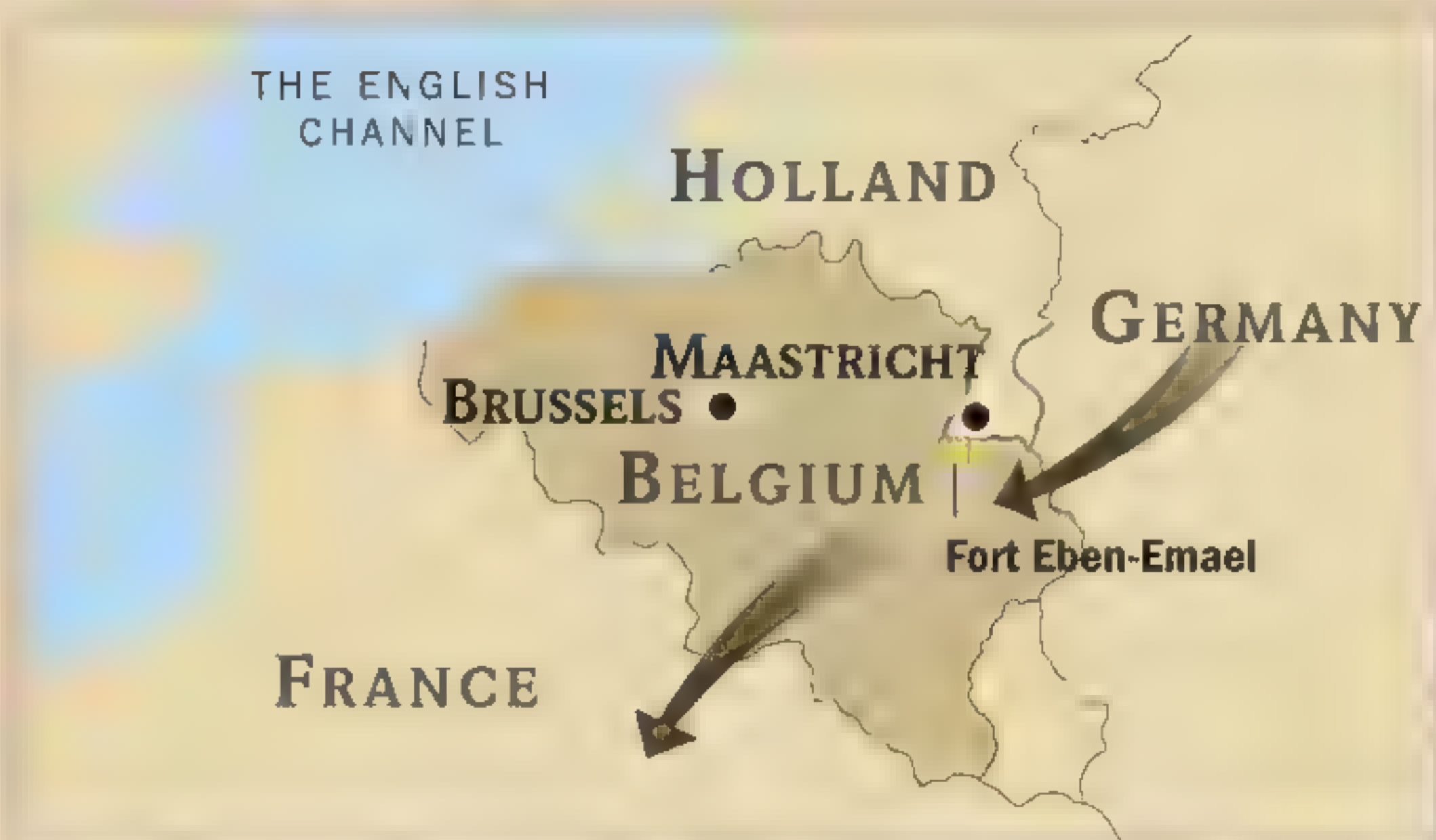


Hitler personally awarded the Knights' Cross to all officers involved in the Eben-Emael mission.



# Attack groups soon took the fort

A total of 83 paratroopers in gliders took part. The soldiers were divided into 11 groups, but only nine reached the fort for the raid. Group 2 had an emergency and returned to Germany while Group 11 was delayed en route.



**The Germans wanted to invade France via Belgium**  
Free access through Belgium was a prerequisite for the German invasion of France. So, Eben-Emael had to be taken.



## Eben-Emael protected three bridges

Military experts considered the Belgian concrete fortress Eben-Emael to be impregnable. The fort was built at the top of a hill and to the east, the Albert Canal made any frontal attack impossible.

A thousand soldiers defended the fortress. At short notice, they could man Eben-Emael's anti-tank and anti-aircraft defences, but their primary duty was operating the fortress's long-range 75-mm and 120-mm howitzers that could blow the bridges over the Meuse and Albert Canal.

## A Anti-aircraft guns were first target

**Participants:** Group 5  
**Target:** Anti-aircraft guns  
Group 5 was the first to land at Eben-Emael a little after 05.00. The pilot ploughed through the fortress's only anti-aircraft position so that the rest of the planes could land safely.

## B Two large guns were destroyed

**Participants:** Groups 1, 2 and 3  
**Target:** The Maastricht guns  
The groups blew up the two guns covering the two bridges to the north. Only Groups 1 and 3 took part in the operation as Group 2 was recalled to Germany.

**Anti-tank trench**  
A five-metre deep trench around Eben-Emael was designed to stop enemy tanks.

**Observation post**

## C Group had a double task

**Participants:** Group 8  
**Target:** Gun positions  
The group's primary targets were two 75-mm artillery positions in the northern part of the fort. After the guns were blown up, the paratroopers targeted the Bloc 4 observation post.



The Albert Canal was built to create a defence against the Germans. At Eben-Emael there was a 40 metre drop down to the water.

MI-Nord  
Machine guns  
protected the  
fort's interior.

Visé 1  
The gun was  
trained on the  
bridge at Visé.



German aerial photos revealed the  
fort's artillery positions and  
machine-gun emplacements.

Nine German gliders silently  
circled down through the  
morning mist over the fort.

Bloc 4  
The observation position was  
taken by Group 8.

Anti-aircraft defences  
The Belgian Army did not  
anticipate an attack from  
the air, so the fort was only  
equipped with a single  
easily manned anti-aircraft  
position with four  
machine guns.

Maastricht 1  
This gun was trained  
on the northern  
bridges.

Maastricht 2  
This gun was  
focused on the  
northern bridges.

Administrative building

Cupola Sud (South)  
The guns here were destroyed  
in the afternoon.

### **E** The guns were fake

■ **Participants:** Groups 6, 7 and 9

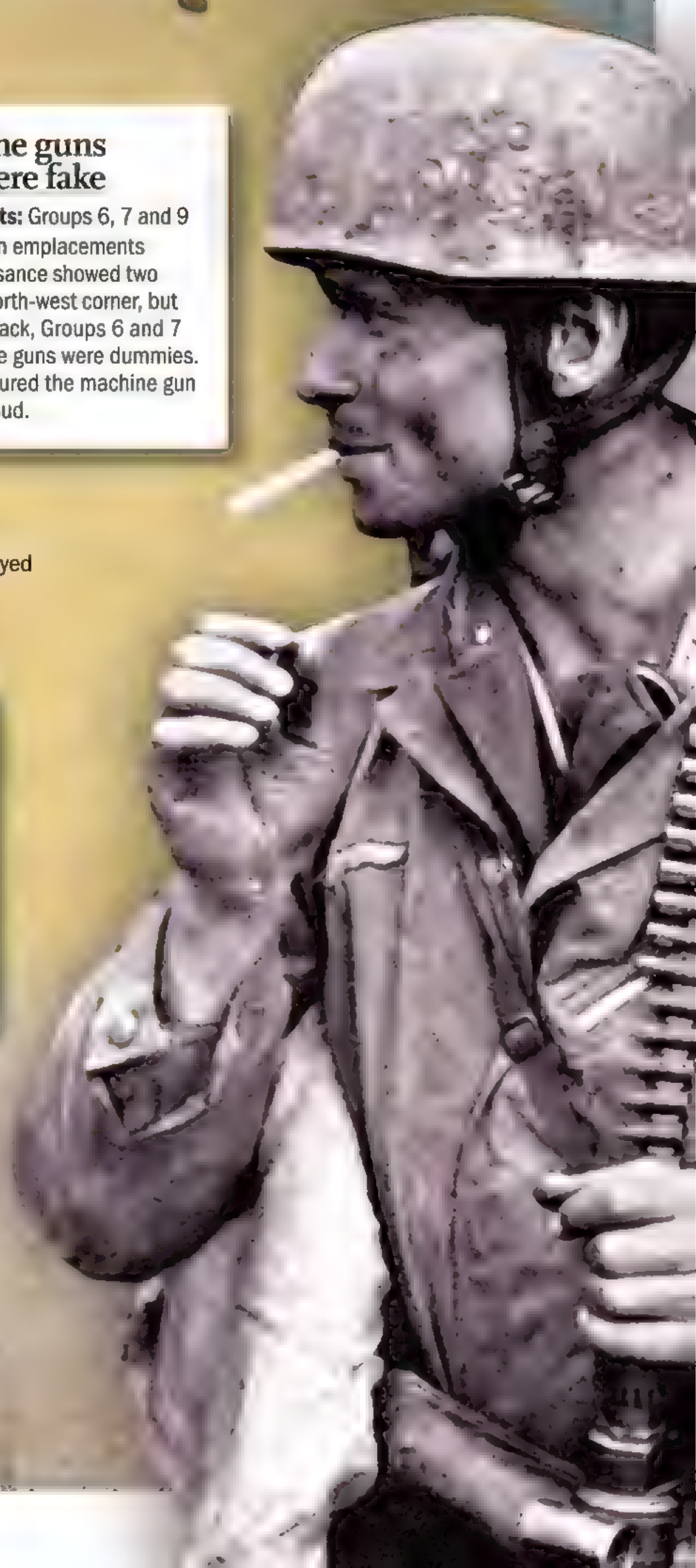
■ **Target:** Gun emplacements  
Air reconnaissance showed two  
guns in the north-west corner, but  
during the attack, Groups 6 and 7  
found that the guns were dummies.  
Group 9 captured the machine gun  
position MI-Sud.

### **D** Target cannon and machine guns

■ **Participants:** Groups 4, 10 and 11

■ **Target:** Visé gun  
Group 4 took the MI-Nord machine  
gun block that protected the fort's  
interior. At the same time, Group 10  
destroyed the Visé 1 gun, which  
protected the bridge at Visé. Group  
11 was delayed and arrived at 08.00.

Armed with explosives and  
flame-throwers, the Germans  
captured the Belgian fort.





The German army was the first to train and use paratroopers.



Pilots in Luftwaffe Junker aircraft wore golden pins with an eagle and swastika.

aircraft were left hanging in the air to begin their silent glide across the Belgian border at 124 km/h.

"There was a light ground mist, through which the outlines of the fortification could be dimly perceived," divisional officer Helmut Wenzel recalled of the seconds just before landing.

In the fortress, a guard watching from the anti-aircraft position was astonished to see the gliders circling down to the fortress through the morning mist.

He and his fellow guards fired their machine guns, but only sporadically – in truth, they weren't sure whether the aircraft were British or German. Only when a wing from one of the gliders plunged through the anti-aircraft artillery positions injuring a man did the truth dawn on the Belgians: Eben-Emael was under attack from German forces.

A few seconds later, the four guards found themselves staring down the barrels of two German machine guns. They threw their weapons to the ground and raised their hands.

### EBEN-EMAEL WAS TAKEN IN JUST TEN MINUTES

Over the next ten minutes, Group Granite came to appreciate the effectiveness of its new shaped-charged explosives. Eben-Emael's thick concrete walls and powerful guns were destroyed quickly and efficiently by the targeted explosions.

Sergeant Niedermeier, who triggered a charge, described the effect on an observation bunker: "We could see that the gun had been torn from its mounting [and] lay like a crumpled matchbox in the corner. The opening was 60 cm x 60 cm so it was big enough for anyone to climb in easily".

Beside the blasted gun lay dead and injured Belgian soldiers. The picture was the same throughout the fort. The many months of training had paid dividends. Those involved with Group Granite destroyed their designated targets in a calm, professional manner. And before Eben-Emael's heavy guns could fire a single shot, the German paratroopers had destroyed them along with other fortified positions around the fort.

### SOLDIERS BARRICADED THEMSELVES IN

The Belgians who survived the explosions fled inside, into the fort's warren of underground corridors. There they were effectively safe from the German units, but it was a two-edged sword as they were also trapped.

It was a simple matter for the elite German troops to lay siege to the bunker complex. During the next 28 hours, the Germans held Eben-Emael while Belgian defenders waited, cut off, inside the fort.

From the Eben-Emael observation towers, the paratroopers watched column after column of German lorries, tanks and other armoured units roll west over the unguarded border. And on the evening of 11th May, the German army's commanders sent the following telegram to Hitler:

"Eben-Emael, which dominates crossings over the Meuse River and the Albert Canal near and west of Maastricht, surrendered on Saturday afternoon. 1,000 men taken prisoner".



Length	11 m
Width	22 m
Weight	1,300 kg
Engine	None
Crew	10 (including pilot)

### ATTACK GLIDER BUILT FROM CANVAS AND STEEL PIPES

The DFS 230 was designed in the 1930s. The wings and hull were made from light steel pipes and tubes clad with canvas. The glider was towed by a plane using a wire 110 metres long. Once the target was in range, the plane released the DFS 230, which glided silently towards the enemy.



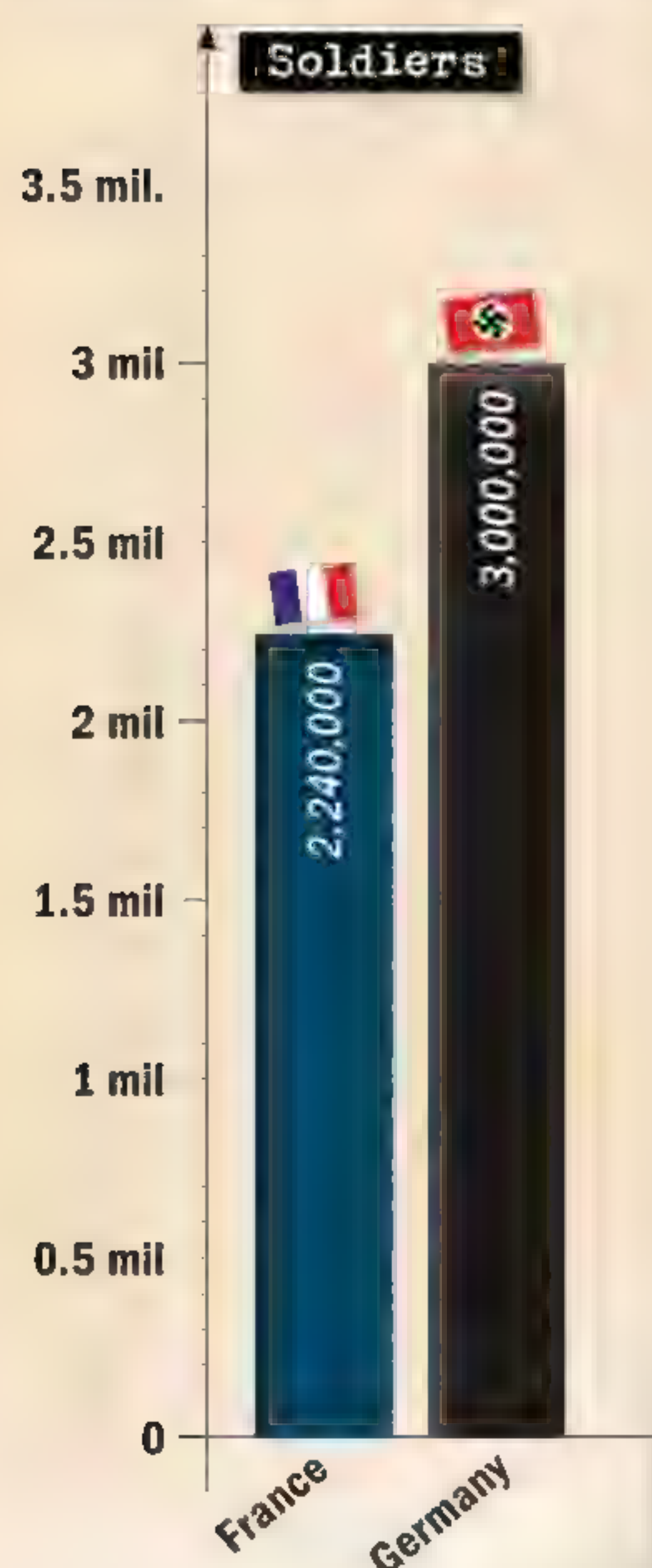
# Fort's fall left France open to blitzkrieg

With the fall of Eben-Emael on 10th May 1940, Germany was free to continue its blitzkrieg advance into France. The tactic involved quickly storming through enemy defences using armoured forces and air cover.

The rapid victory in Belgium gave the Germans a psychological edge, but their superiority in the air was the Nazis' biggest advantage. Their dominance was not just down to weight of numbers – their aircraft were also technically superior to France's. The French, on the other hand, had more tanks – an advantage that they didn't fully utilise. Unlike the Germans, who grouped their tanks together in large storming divisions, the French used them as support for existing units.

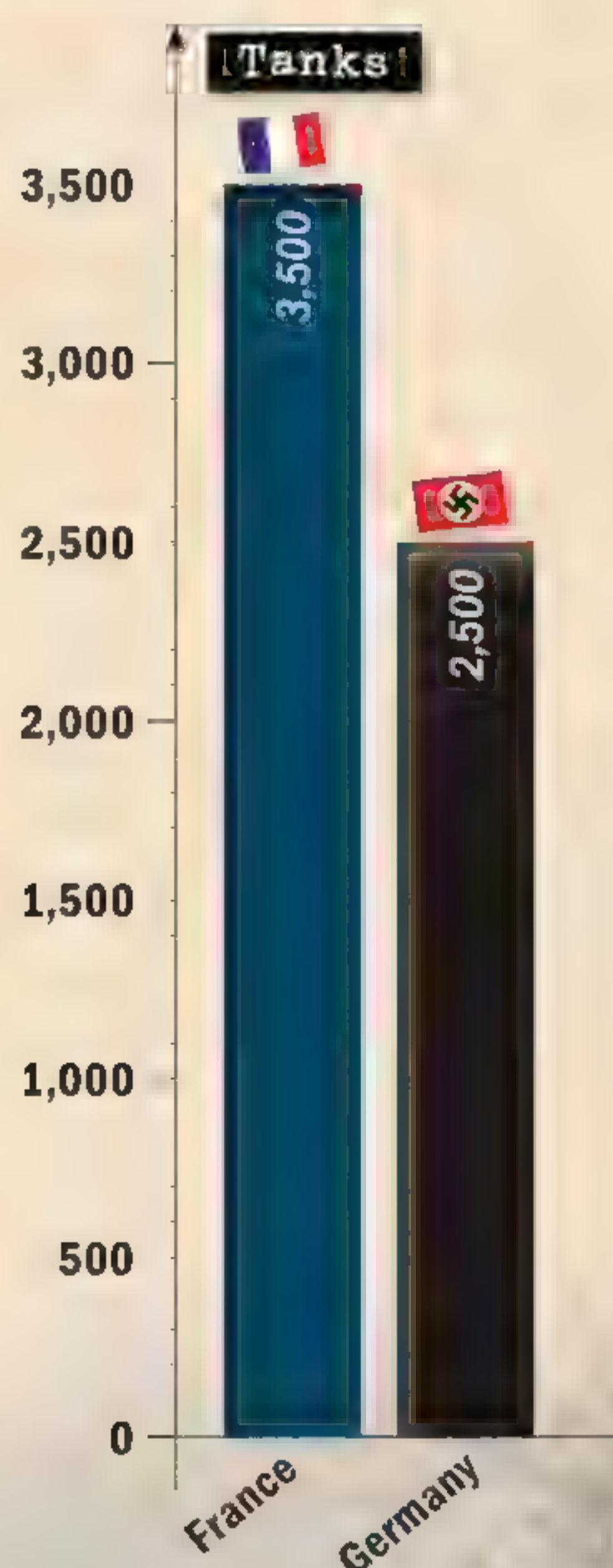


## Germans had the most soldiers and aircraft



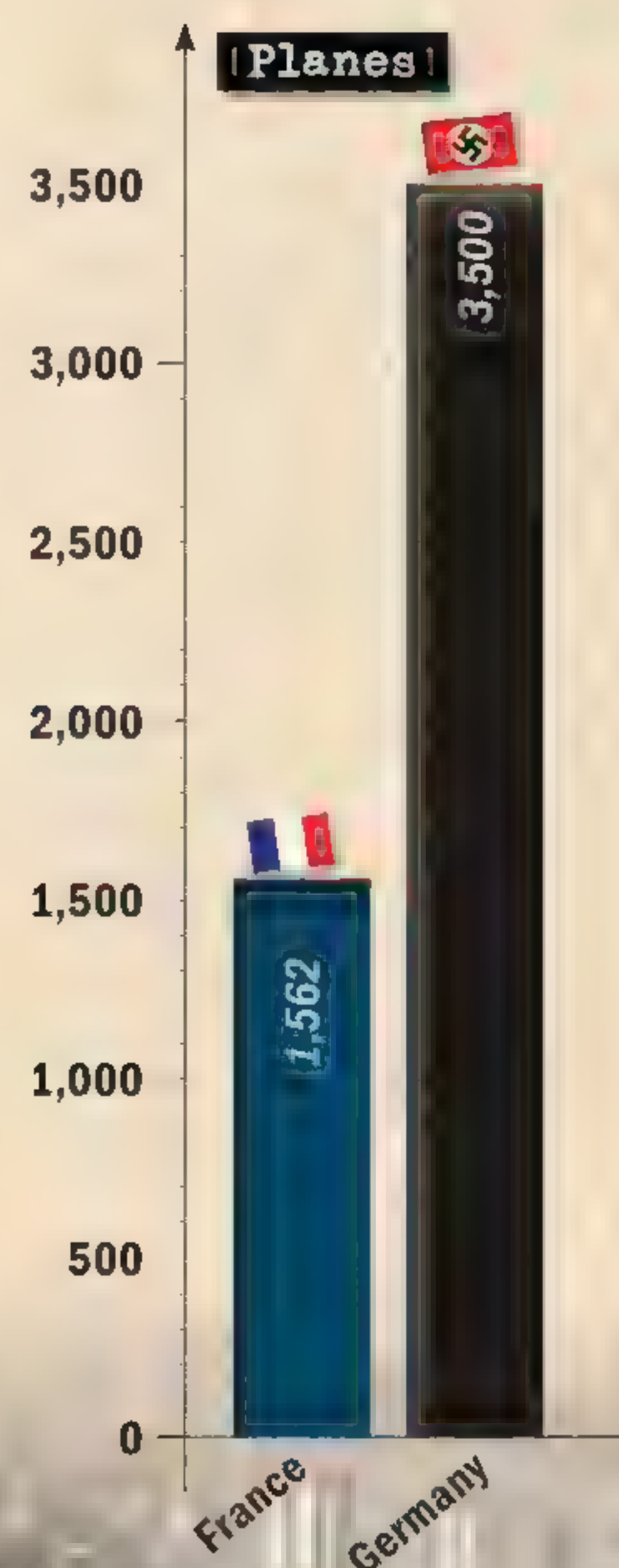
### Soldiers were superior

Germany had a large army and its troops were well-trained.



### Tanks used incorrectly

French tanks were usually used to support other ground units.



### Luftwaffe was superior

In the air, the new German Luftwaffe held sway.

German tanks were organised into special all-armoured divisions which proved to be a highly effective tactic.

The surviving Belgian Eben-Emael soldiers were led into captivity by the Germans.





TACTICAL GERMAN OFFENSIVE

# BLITZKRIEG FORCES EUROPE TO ITS KNEES

At the beginning of World War II Germany has fewer tanks, soldiers and aircraft than France and Britain. However, Prussian General Heinz Guderian has, with Hitler's approval, developed a groundbreaking military tactic: blitzkrieg. This new strategy makes Germany's armoured divisions invincible during the early years of the war.



# 1940

12<sup>TH</sup> MAY





*Following an initial aerial bombardment, German infantry storm the enemy's lines flanked by tanks. The assault is supported by powerful artillery guns.*



## THE STAGE IS SET



Hitler's armies blast through France's defences. In six weeks, the Germans have overrun one of Europe's major nations thanks to a new form of warfare. Conceived by a veteran of WWI, the new tactic is known as *blitzkrieg* (lightning war) and is based on a combination of light bombers and fast armoured divisions.

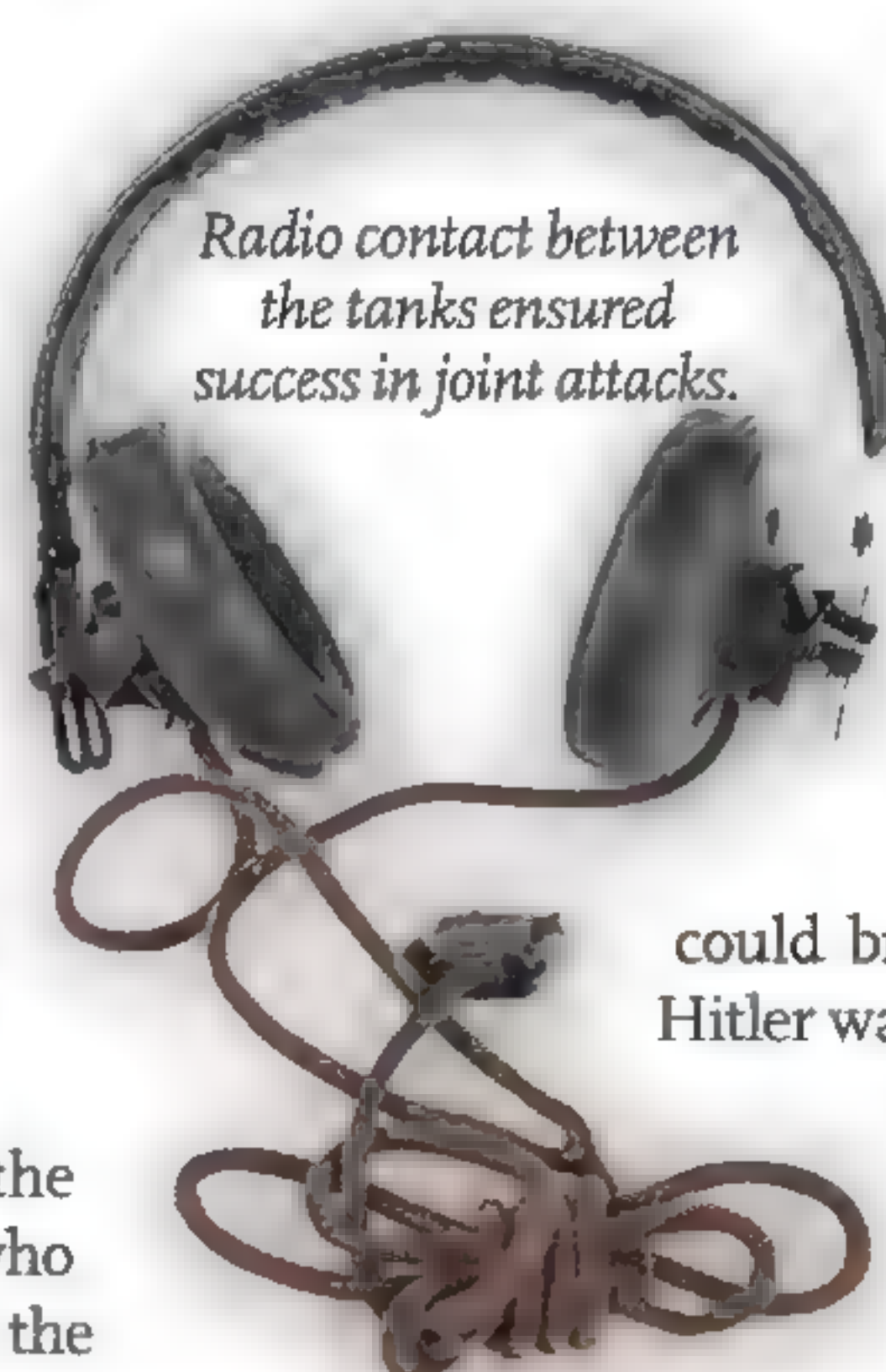


ON 12TH MAY 1940, STUKA BOMBERS swarmed over the French trenches near the town of Sedan. Germany's invasion of France was in full swing. The air reverberated to the sounds of explosions and the howling sirens of small dive bombers plunging into almost vertical dives before releasing their 250-kilogram bombs. The French soldiers at Sedan had unknowingly become the victims of history's greatest air strikes so far – and to the Germans' new blitzkrieg style of war.

The sounds of Stuka sirens shredded the nerves of the soldiers on the ground, who cowered in their trenches. Suddenly, at 15.30, the noise from the screaming Stukas was drowned out by an infernal thunder as hundreds of German artillery guns opened fire. This devastating bombardment rained destruction on what was left of the French trenches.

The shells shredded the barbed wire and smashed the defenders' bunkers. German planes and guns spent the next 30 minutes systematically bombing the French lines.

At 16.00, the guns fell silent. The first tactical phase of the Germans' new lightning war was over – German



Radio contact between the tanks ensured success in joint attacks.

reconnaissance units would now probe the defences, searching for the weakest point in the destabilised French positions.

The theory behind the new tactic had been formulated by a veteran of World War I – Heinz Guderian – who had first-hand experience of how bloody and hopeless trench warfare could be. He realised that a massive combined attack by tanks and aircraft could break through an opponent's line of defence. Hitler was thrilled with Guderian's ideas and made the tactician a general shortly after seizing power in 1933.

To ensure the success of Guderian's lightning war, Hitler developed one of World War II's most effective war machines: the armoured panzer divisions.

Previously, German infantry, artillery and tanks had been distributed throughout the different forces. Now they were combined to create devastating weapons. The divisions' mobility and their ability to exploit the strengths of their various units were the main reasons why the Germans won so many victories in the early years of the war. An individual armoured division usually consisted of 16,000 men and 3,000 vehicles. This included around 200 tanks, gathered in large groups, which could easily defeat the small, scattered clusters of tanks fielded by the enemy.

In addition to the armoured weapons, the panzer divisions were equipped with assault guns and soldiers in armoured vehicles that supported the tanks. Finally, mobile supply troops with fuel and ammunition completed the German's new war machine, which at the beginning of World War II shattered all resistance.

### ARMoured DIVISION BREAKS THROUGH

Two days after the barrage at Sedan on 14th May 1940, General Guderian's 2nd Panzer Army blazed through the French barbed wire on the Sedan front. The day before, engineering troops in personnel carriers had declared that this was weakest point in the French line of defence – and now the heavy tanks were rolling through what was left of the enemy's fortifications.

The rotating tracks of the 200 attacking tanks churned up the ground and shook the French trenches. Exhausted after the intense artillery bombardment and demoralised by the Stukas' screaming sirens, the French soldiers fled

NAME **HEINZ GUDERIAN**

TITLE GERMAN GENERAL

### Prussian officer devised lightning war

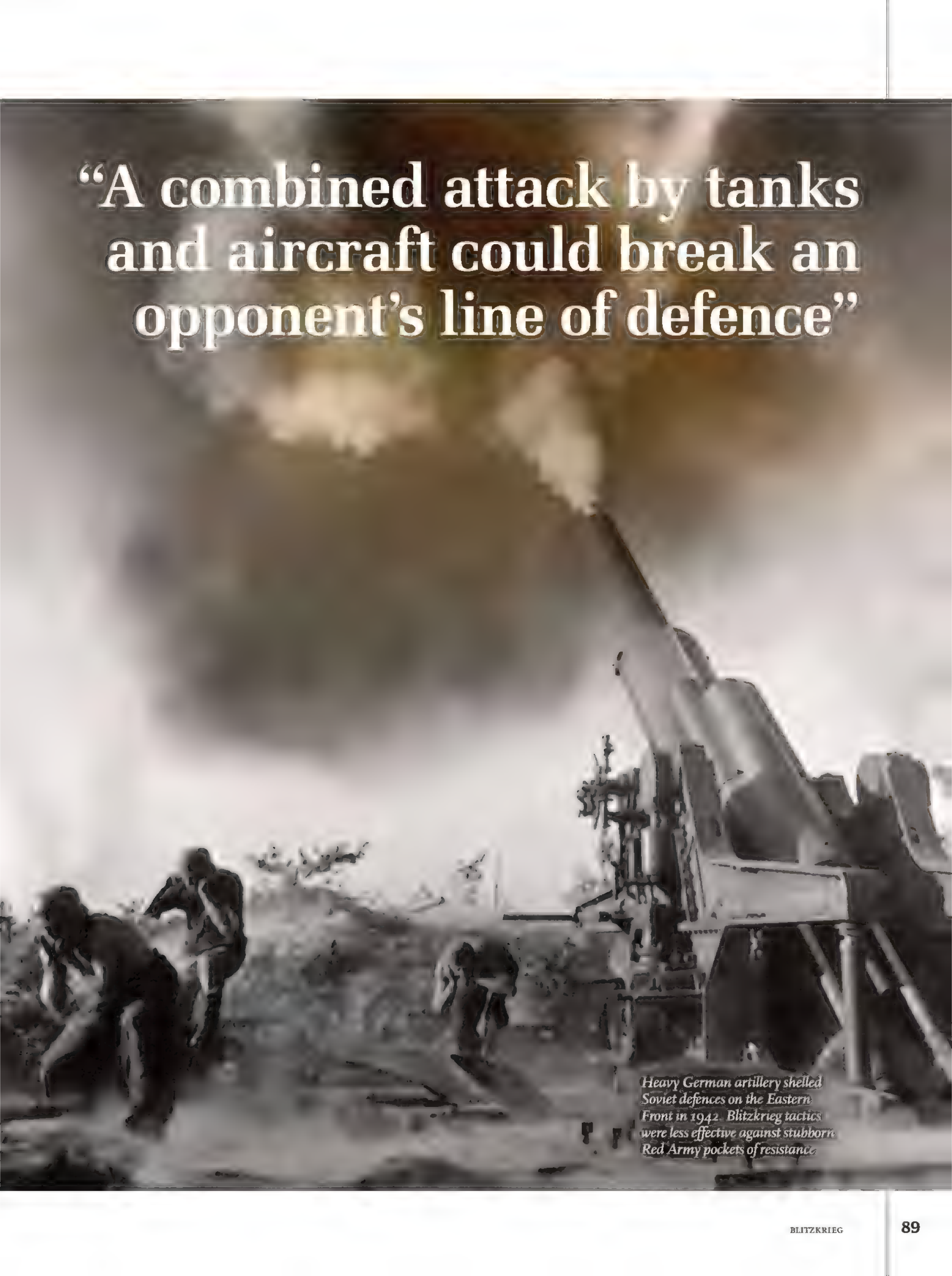
Veteran officer Heinz Guderian had personal experience of failed German attempts to capture Allied trenches in northern France during WWI. He observed how fast vehicles and aircraft could revolutionise warfare and help overrun entrenched positions. If tanks were assembled in large groups, they could break through enemy lines and secure victory. Guderian described his theories in the book *Achtung – Panzer!* and the tactics proved effective on the battlefields of Poland in 1939 and the following year in France: both countries were defeated in under six weeks.

- > Veteran from World War I.
- > Architect of German blitzkrieg tactics.



1888-1954



A black and white photograph of a heavy German artillery piece firing a shell. A large plume of smoke and fire rises from the barrel. In the foreground, several soldiers are visible, some crouching and others standing, observing the firing. The scene is set in a field with some trees in the background.

**“A combined attack by tanks and aircraft could break an opponent’s line of defence”**

*Heavy German artillery shelled Soviet defences on the Eastern Front in 1942. Blitzkrieg tactics were less effective against stubborn Red Army pockets of resistance.*



# Four phases secured German victories

The German strategy was designed to engineer a rapid breakthrough of the opponent's lines of defence, followed by the systematic destruction of any remaining resistance among the enemy's isolated forces.

## PHASE 1



### Soften the enemy

Artillery guns start a vigorous bombardment of the weakest point in the enemy's position, while dive bombers take out enemy tanks and their defences.

- 1 Stukas attack** the enemy guns, tanks, bunkers and other heavily fortified defences.
- 2 Artillery fires** thousands of shells against the weakest point in the enemy front line at the same time.
- 3 Tanks help** with the initial bombardment, but remain out of range of any enemy counterattacks.

## PHASE 2



### Pierce the enemy

Tank units penetrate the enemy's defence; infantry forces follow.

- 1 Tanks assault** the weakest point in the enemy line of defence in a wedge formation. Once through, they attack enemy command centres.
- 2 Soldiers in armoured vehicles** support the tanks' assault, advancing behind enemy lines to take new targets.
- 3 Artillery is ready** to attack any highly fortified enemy positions.
- 4 The enemy's headquarters** is relatively unprotected and vulnerable behind the front line.

## PHASE 3



### Attack deep

Tanks continue into enemy territory, severing all communication. The troops start to surround the enemy.

- 1 Troop transports** move forward. Their job is to ensure that enemy troops do not close the gap in the line of defence and cut off the attacking tanks.
- 2 Tanks attack** the enemy headquarters, disable their communication systems and create chaos and confusion.
- 3 The motorised forces** spread deep behind the enemy line. Tasks include surrounding the forces manning defence installations and defeating supply troops.

## PHASE 4

### Take on the enemy

The enemy forces are isolated in 'pockets' - they no longer have access to supplies or contact with the outside world. The pockets are defeated one-by-one using specially trained infantry, dive bombers and guns.

#### **3** Soldiers move in

**Support troops go into action.** Their role is to defeat individual enemy pockets. Recognising their hopeless position, the encircled units often surrender without a struggle.



#### **2** Massive bombing

**The artillery launches a fierce bombardment of the pockets,** which is designed to weaken enemy resistance.

*The 15-tonne Panzer II heavy tank was the backbone of the German armoured divisions.*





# **1** The enemy is surrounded

The enemy forces are now surrounded and locked inside a pocket, where they are cut off from communicating with the outside world and have no chance of receiving reinforcements or supplies.

Infantry that marched and fought on foot still made up the bulk of the German army during World War II



German soldiers fight for control of one of the Maginot Line's fortifications in France in June 1940. Flamethrowers were often used to clear bunkers during the battles for these fortified positions.



German troops attack a French position in June 1940. The soldiers are supported by fire from powerful artillery units.

Waffen-SS' panzer crews wore a black cap with German eagles and Totenkopf skull and crossbones.

in panic. France's army commanders tried to summon reserves to plug the widening gap in their line, but the thousands of panicking soldiers were creating chaos, and their heavy tanks became stuck on the jammed roads. Meanwhile, the German tanks rolled unwaveringly on through the kilometre-wide gap while German infantry established defensive positions with mortars and anti-tank guns.

### THE GERMANS STORM OUT

French reserves marching towards the front were easy pickings for German tanks and reconnaissance units. Stukas chased French tanks, bombing them one by one. Only 20 kilometres behind the front line, Guderian ordered his tanks to the west – behind the heavily fortified Maginot Line, which extended along the French-German border.

The German manoeuvre surrounded the French soldiers in what was supposed to be their 'impregnable' fortress. Now, they were isolated without any possibility of help. The rest of the German divisions stormed towards the English Channel, reaching it in 10 days. 400,000 Allied soldiers in north-west France and Belgium were thus cut off from their main force and unable to obtain supplies and ammunition. Trapped in a 'pocket' at the French port of Dunkirk, they were forced to escape to Britain in a hastily

assembled flotilla that included everything from warships to fishing boats.

France's army was on the point of collapse, but the final defeat of the encircled forces would come at the hands of Germany's special support troops.

### THE GERMANS' GREATEST VICTORY

By the end of May 1940, the encircled French soldiers were fighting for their lives in the fortifications at Sedan and along the Maginot Line. The German special support units moved

from bunker to bunker with flamethrowers and grenades. The prospect of dying in a hopeless battle caused the French soldiers to surrender in their thousands. Soon, the road to Paris was open, and on 25th June 1940, France surrendered.

In just six weeks, the German armoured divisions defeated one of Europe's great powers and assuaged many Germans of the bitterness they had felt following their defeat in WWI. The French campaign was destined not only to be the Germans' first blitzkrieg, but also their greatest. The following year – during the

invasion of the Soviet Union – the lightning war began to slow as the Russians fought bitterly in every enclosed pocket.

The fierce battles delayed the infantry's advance and isolated the German armoured divisions several hundred kilometres ahead of the rest of the army. The lack of fuel, ammunition and auxiliary troops ultimately halted the German advance just 20 kilometres shy of Moscow in December 1941. Guderian's blitzkrieg had finally stalled.

### Infantry

in the armoured divisions of World War II had armour-plated personnel carriers that offered protection and could quickly move them around the battlefield.



# Allies successfully copied blitzkrieg tactics

Following Germany's early victories, the Allies soon adopted its lightning war tactics. From 1942, they fought Hitler at his own game in offenses both on the Eastern Front and on the battlefields of Western Europe. Blitzkrieg tactics are still used today when there is sufficient air and armoured strength available.

## Battle of Stalingrad

France's rapid defeat in 1940 led the US, Soviet and British military to change the structure of their armies. The Allies began concentrating their tanks in large units, rather than spreading them through their forces. From spring 1942, they fought the formerly invincible German army with the blitzkrieg four-phase approach, including at the Battle of Stalingrad, where in November 1942, the Soviets surrounded the German 6th Army capturing 300,000 soldiers.



*Soviet artillery surrounded the German troops at Stalingrad.*



*Canadian armoured forces participated in the dash through France in 1944.*

## The outbreak from the bridgehead after D-Day

Once the Allies had landed on the Normandy coast in June 1944, they advanced rapidly. The outbreak from the bridgehead established in the

north of France proceeded quickly. Aircraft and armoured units combined to break the German lines and clear the path for the liberation of Paris.

## Gulf wars against Iraq

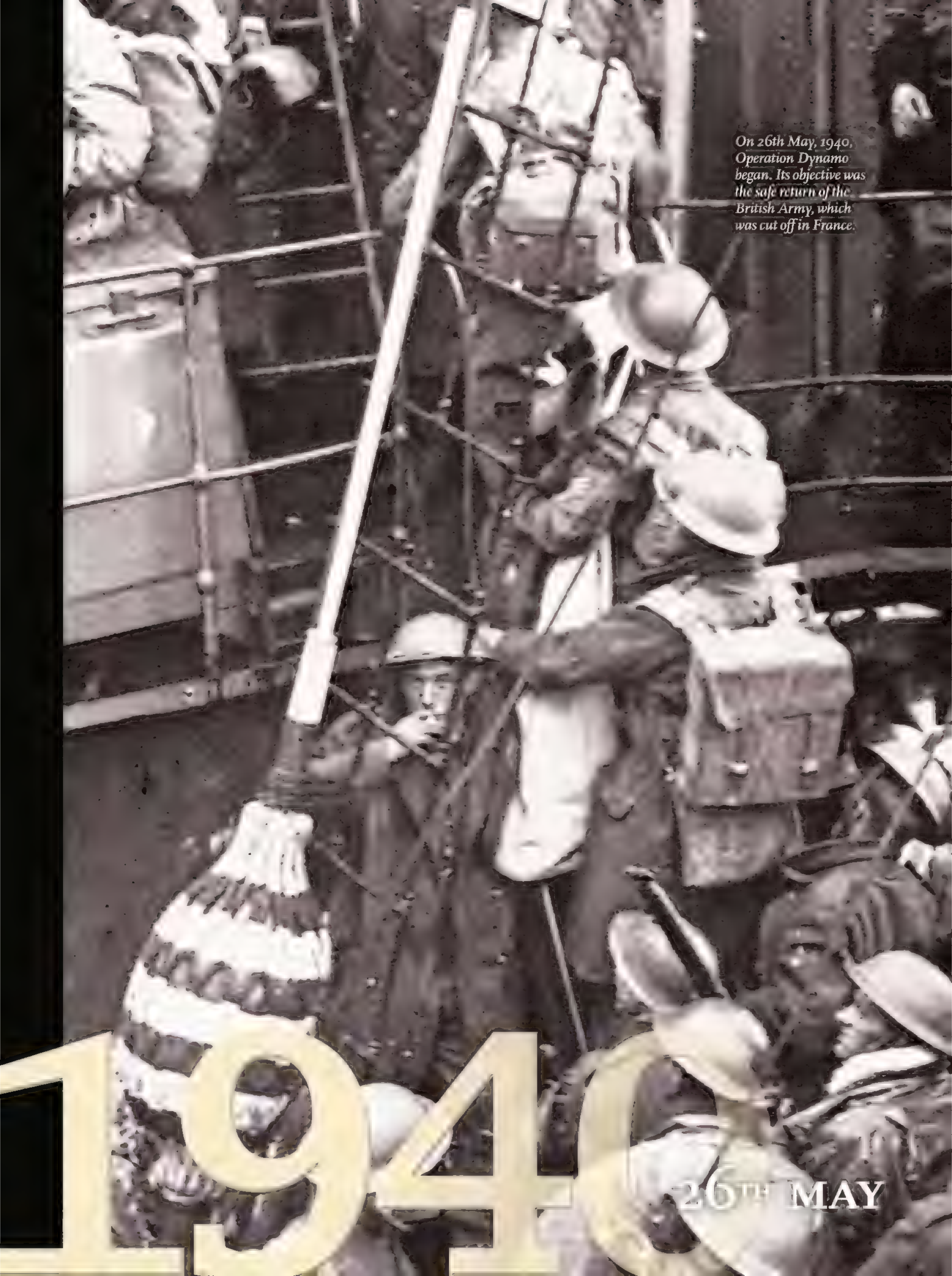
Even today, Heinz Guderian's groundbreaking theories of lightning war still apply. The two Gulf Wars that were waged against Iraq in 1990-1991 and 2003 are text-book examples of the superiority of modern warfare. The

coalition first softened up the enemy with a lengthy and powerful bombardment of strategic targets, followed by a rapid armoured assault, which quickly defeated Saddam Hussein's weakened forces.



*American F-16 fighters bombed Iraq during Operation Desert Storm in 1991.*





On 26th May, 1940,  
Operation Dynamo  
began. Its objective was  
the safe return of the  
British Army, which  
was cut off in France.

1940

26<sup>TH</sup> MAY





• HISTORY'S BIGGEST EVACUATION •

# THE MIRACLE AT DUNKIRK

In 1940, 400,000 Allied soldiers are fighting for their lives near the French city of Dunkirk. Surrounded on three sides by German armoured divisions and with their backs to the sea, the situation is hopeless. But salvation comes from the west as the British Navy launches history's largest-ever evacuation operation.



## Dunkirk 1940

## THE SCENE IS SET



On 10th May, 1940, Nazi Germany attacks its western neighbours: Belgium, the Netherlands and France. The British Expeditionary Force has been deployed to the continent in a bid to stop Hitler's fast-moving armoured assault, but within weeks, it is pushed all the way back to the northern French coast, by the city of Dunkirk.



**"I** HEARD THE STUKA COMING DOWN IN A vertical dive right on top of me," Gunner Lieutenant James Elliman later wrote about the situation at Dunkirk on 28th May, 1940. "I was by now dulled by hours...of explosions... death aroused no great feeling of fear.... I thought of Margaret in those few seconds of suspense, and she brought me a sort of peace of the spirit. The next moment: Crash! Darkness! And then a vision of falling sand in front of me."

Along with thousands of British and French soldiers, Elliman was huddled behind the wreck of a steamer at the water's edge in a desperate attempt to find shelter from German artillery shells and the Luftwaffe's machine guns.

Eighteen days earlier, German troops had attacked France. Advancing at speed, they'd trapped the bulk of the Allied

army on a narrow strip of land bordering the English Channel. Nearly 400,000 men now faced annihilation on the beaches near Dunkirk (Dunkerque to the French).

For Britain, the situation was disastrous: 270,000 of those men belonged to the prestigious British Expeditionary Force.

In an attempt to salvage the situation, Britain's new prime minister, Winston Churchill, sanctioned Operation Dynamo – the evacuation of Allied forces from Dunkirk on 26th May, 1940. The goal was to save as many soldiers as possible from the beaches of Northern France and bring them home to defend the British Isles from a possible German invasion.

**ONLY 45,000 SOLDIERS COULD BE RESCUED**

Operation Dynamo was a remarkable collaboration between the Royal Navy and the country's civilian population from the

*German fighter planes mercilessly attacked the stranded soldiers on the beach at Dunkirk, some of whom tried to return fire – usually in vain.*





start. The admiralty had 38 destroyers, which immediately began ferrying rescued soldiers across the Channel. However, the navy's commanders estimated that their ships could only evacuate 45,000 men before the Germans broke through.

When the British public heard about the soldiers' predicament, however, they came together to help their stranded countrymen. Ferry and shipping companies immediately provided 250 large vessels to participate in the evacuation, while patriotic civilians signed up to the venture. By 27th May, more than 850 "Little Ships" – pleasure boats, yachts, launches and fishing boats – were ready to give their all as part of Operation Dynamo.

These small, unarmed ships had shallow drafts and would perform the most dangerous task: they had to cross the English Channel in convoys, then transport the evacuees from the shallow waters of the beaches to the large, armed destroyers lying further out.

### **WATER WAS AWASH WITH THE FLOATING DEAD**

The evacuation got underway on 28th May, when hundreds of ships began crossing the Channel.

The sight that met the civilians at Dunkirk was appalling. The dense smoke from burning oil tanks lay in a thick layer over the jumble of small boats and waiting soldiers, and powerful explosions reverberated all around the port city. The British soldiers had set fire to many of the oil refineries in an attempt to block the Luftwaffe's view of the beach and so earn some respite from the constant airstrikes.

The water's edge was littered with the bodies of the dead and wounded, while the sound of the Germans' endless bombardment drummed across the sky. Soldiers in their hundreds waited in the Channel, with cold water – still only around 12 degrees Celsius in late spring – up to their necks.

### **SMALL BOATS PICKED UP SOLDIERS**

Colin Dick – one of the volunteers – arrived in Dunkirk in a convoy of smaller vessels on 29th May, at around noon. His first order was to sail his motor boat, *Advance*, towards the beach to fetch British soldiers and take them to a nearby destroyer. It was a potentially lethal mission. The air over Dunkirk was alive with German Stuka and Messerschmit, which spewed bullets constantly towards the rescue boats.

"German dive-bombers were constantly strafing us and everything else in sight.... One of them flew so low over us that it clipped the top of our mast clean off," Dick recalled.

Despite this setback, *Advance* succeeded in tugging an old whaler through the burning oil and twisted hulls towards the waiting lines of soldiers. Each time the whaler was full of exhausted soldiers, Dick tugged it back towards the destroyer.

### **GERMAN AIRCRAFT SHREDDING THE AIR**

After one trip, the soldiers Dick had rescued were scrambling aboard the destroyer when a German aircraft began attacking

On 10th May, 1940, hostile German troops crossed the Belgian border. Ten days later, they had reached the English Channel.



## **Germans stopped a few kilometres from Dunkirk**

Hitler ordered the German advance to halt. The pause gave the British time to evacuate.

In May 1940, German armoured divisions rattled through northern France towards the English Channel. They reached the coast on 20th May, trapping the bulk of the Allied forces on a strip of land near the port city of Dunkirk. But they didn't take advantage of the situation to crush their enemy. Instead, Hitler ordered a halt to their lightning advance a few kilometres from Dunkirk.

Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt later described the decision as one of Germany's biggest mistakes. Historians suspect that Hitler believed Britain would sue for peace, rather than face Germany's obviously superior military force.

the destroyer. In an attempt to avoid the assault, the destroyer suddenly lurched forward with a powerful jerk, dislodging some of the soldiers who were still clambering up the nets that had been lowered to the motorboat. Three or four men fell, some being crushed between *Advance* and the destroyer; all but one disappeared beneath the sea's surface, never to be seen again.

Dick went on doggedly making trips to and from the beach throughout the afternoon – though these were often in vain. His companion on the *Advance*, Eric

# **“We saw our kinsmen literally blown to pieces”**



# Operation Dynamo saved over 338,000 soldiers

Soldiers in Dunkirk were evacuated via three routes. Minefields, sandbanks, German U-boats and coastal gun positions made the journey perilous for the British ships.

The French destroyer Bourrasque hit a mine and was sunk shortly after by German gun batteries on the coast. Five hundred men perished.



## 28th May

### Evacuation gets underway

Hundreds of ships arrive to pick up the soldiers.

**Soldiers at Dunkirk** 380,864  
**Evacuated soldiers** 25,473

THE ENGLISH CHANNEL



## 31st May

### The front line is just 15 km away

The British rearguard struggles to keep the Germans at bay.

**Soldiers at Dunkirk** 211,717  
**Evacuated soldiers** 194,620

THE ENGLISH CHANNEL



## 1st June

### Dunkirk is surrounded

The British rearguard joins the queues on the beach.

**Soldiers at Dunkirk** 147,288  
**Evacuated soldiers** 259,049

THE ENGLISH CHANNEL



## 2nd June

### Allies are forced back to the sea

French soldiers continue to fight while the last British flee by boat.

**Soldiers at Dunkirk** 121,032  
**Evacuated soldiers** 285,305

THE ENGLISH CHANNEL







An unknown number of British soldiers, sailors and civilians lost their lives at Dunkirk.



After the war, the city of Dunkirk awarded special medals to the French soldiers who had defended it during the evacuation.

Hamilton-Piercy, later wrote about the horrors they witnessed:

“We saw our kinsmen literally blown to pieces after we had, as we thought, deposited them in safety on the larger ships. We ourselves were deliberately bombed by a plane...and our boat was actually blown out of the water. A number of holes appeared on her starboard side, but fortunately none of us were hit.”

Dick and Hamilton-Piercy continued to evacuate a total of 450 men before *Advance*, with water seeping into her hull, fought her way back across the Channel. The boat was too damaged to take any further part in Operation Dynamo.

### SHIP AFTER SHIP WENT DOWN

Not all the vessels were lucky enough to make it back to Britain. Hundreds of sailors were injured and killed in explosions off the French coast. The destroyer *HMS Grenade*, which was tied up at Dunkirk’s only navigable pier on 29th May, came under heavy attack by German aircraft. Nineteen-year-old sailor Bob Bloom was in the destroyer’s engine room when a Stuka bomber hit the ship with deadly accuracy:

“A bomb went down the ship’s forward funnel and exploded. I was thrown up in the air and hit the deckhead. Then I fell back into the blast.... As it hit me, I put my hands up to my face to protect it. It felt as if I had been hit six times on the face with a whip. I was in such pain that I prayed to God to take me.”

Bloom survived the attack; the *HMS Grenade* did not. The warship was one of six British and three French destroyers that the Germans sank during the ten days Operation Dynamo lasted; 26 others were damaged beyond repair.

Nine ferries sank along with an unknown number of small boats. The ships that sunk left dead and wounded men bobbing in the sea, while survivors clung to the wreckage. The chaos was total; often men jumped from one sinking ship to be picked up by another, which was then hit in turn.

### TRAFFIC DELAYED THE EVACUATION

While everything was chaos at sea, some form of organisation prevailed on land. The British officers enforced a steely discipline to ensure that the stranded soldiers didn’t overwhelm the rescue vessels.

While Colin Dick zigzagged his motor boat among the wreckage, ferrying troops out to sea, Lieutenant Elliman was ordered to bring his 40-man unit to the evacuation zone on the eastern shore.

In spite of the army’s clear evacuation orders, the small dirt roads around Dunkirk were crowded with British and French troops, as thousands tried to squeeze their way on to a bridge leading to the port at Dunkirk.

The soldiers’ only hope was to board one of the small boats before the Germans captured the narrow stretch of land still in Allied hands. The thousands of soldiers

### 3rd June

**The Germans are just 5 km away**  
The beaches are too dangerous – the last British ships leave.

<b>Soldiers at Dunkirk</b>	94,286
<b>Evacuated soldiers</b>	312,051



### 4th June

**The French fight on alone**  
Around 40,000 French and 28,000 wounded British are left behind.

<b>Soldiers at Dunkirk</b>	68,111
<b>Evacuated soldiers</b>	338,226



Trapped British and French soldiers



on the roads stopped all traffic and forced Elliman to leave his Humber truck on the outskirts of Dunkirk, along with all the other abandoned Allied vehicles – many of which had been set alight to prevent them falling into enemy hands.

In the grey daylight, Lieutenant Elliman's soldiers continued on foot towards the last bridge over one of Dunkirk's canals. He recorded the event later:

"Suddenly I heard a swish and an explosion. A cloud of smoke and earth was pitched into the air just to the left of the bridge.... A couple of officers climbed down, and swam across the canal. But...I decided to go on to within 50 yards of the bridge, and then sprint across to the other side.... So I dumped my haversack and...we made our dash, and got well into the fields beyond the canal before pausing for

breath. Whoof! We'd made it. As I learned later, the enemy scored a direct hit on the bridge five minutes after we crossed it, and just after my last gunner had got across."

#### KILOMETRE-LONG QUEUES ON THE BEACHES

The smashed bridge divided the Allied troops in two: those who fought against the Germans on the far side of the canal, and those who were temporarily secure. The lucky ones headed for the beaches, which quickly began to fill up. The assembly area was packed with Allied troops standing in kilometre-long lines across the sand and out into the waves. There was no protection from German air strikes.

When Elliman reached the beach, he felt no relief – only anxiety. "The sandy beach was about 100 yards wide. Down

# "We failed to move forward..."



The British media cheered on the gigantic joint effort that miraculously saved more than 300,000 British soldiers from being taken as German POWs.



the centre stood the line of men, three abreast. The smoke... from the burning oil tanks drifted eastwards over the town," Elliman recalled. "And then it started! A formation of high fliers came up from the west, and dropped stick after stick of bombs.... This first attack...was most unnerving. You felt so completely exposed on the beach."

When the attack stopped, the lieutenant immediately ordered his soldiers back in line. The battle for places on the boats was intense, with new troops constantly pouring down from the dunes.

#### **PLANES ATTACKED THE SOLDIERS ON THE BEACH**

It was the same story everywhere. Soldiers were marching or standing in the sand. The lucky ones crouched in the dunes,

but most had to wait on the beaches or in the waves, while German dive bombers attacked them. Fortunately, the bombs often drilled into the sand before detonating, and the sand absorbed most of the explosion and shrapnel.

After half a day in one of the long queues, Elliman's unit decided to switch to a different line – one leading to the city's only remaining pier. Here, the fleet's larger ships were tied up ready to transport the exhausted troops.

But Elliman's troubles weren't over. There were too many men for too few ships. The lieutenant wrote later how the line didn't move: "We failed to move forward.... Only the wounded were got away that night.... As the hours went by, the spirits of all must have been sinking.... Mine certainly were. Sleep was impossible. It was just

# Only the wounded got away"



*Although British officers tried to organise the flow of men, the soldiers had to wait for days on the beach. They made easy targets for the Luftwaffe pilots.*



# "The cries of the wounded were heart-rending"

waiting, waiting, waiting." It wasn't until the next morning – 30th May – that Elliman's unit took a ship out of Dunkirk.

## BRITISH DESTROYER SANK A FISHING BOAT

Even the lucky ones who made it to the ships waiting offshore were still in danger. While Elliman's unit was still stuck at the pier, a tragedy occurred 30 km into the English Channel.

The commander of the minesweeper *HMS Lydd* panicked after a German torpedo boat sank the British destroyer *HMS Wakeful*. The *Lydd*'s captain ordered all lights on his ship to be put out, then opened fire on what his crew, struggling to see properly in the dark, mistakenly identified as a German motor torpedo boat.

The *Lydd* rammed the boat and split it in two. The boat's terrified survivors were shot with rifles and left to drown. It was only later that the *Lydd*'s crew discovered the truth. What they had supposed to be a German motor torpedo boat was

a British fishing boat, *HMS Comfort*, and the Germans they thought they'd shot were British sailors and evacuees, none of whom survived the attack.

Meanwhile, back on land, the Germans were edging ever nearer, and the situation on the narrow beach was becoming increasingly desperate.

## WOUNDED WERE LEFT TO DROWN

On 1st June, the remnants of the British rearguard arrived at the assembly area to await evacuation. Major Rupert Colvin, one of the last British officers in France, was among them. His report revealed how the dunes and beach were filled with

*Churchill during a July 1940 inspection of returned soldiers, who were by then defending Britain.*

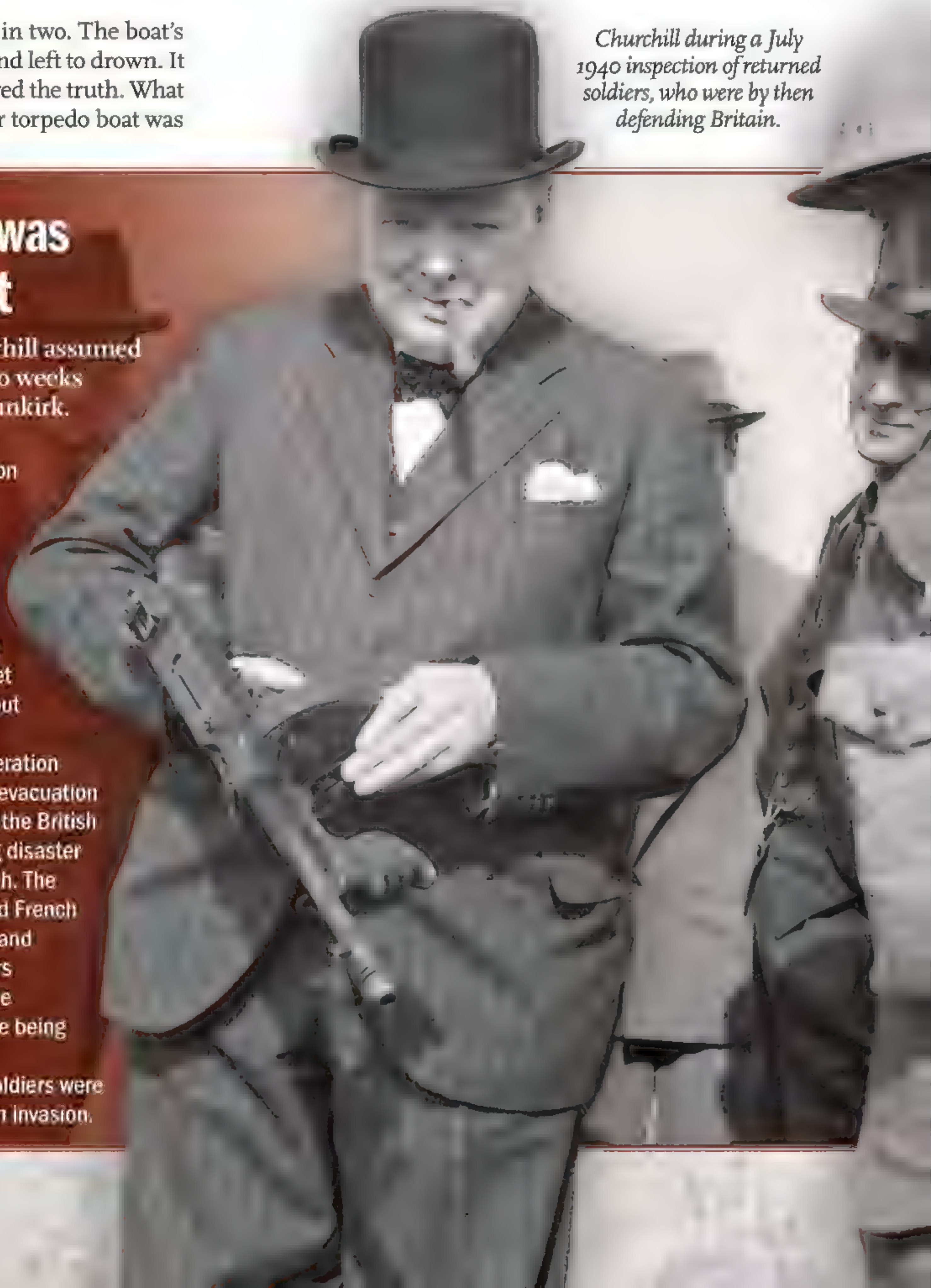
## Operation Dynamo was Churchill's first test

On 10th May, 1940, Winston Churchill assumed the post of prime minister. Only two weeks later, he authorised the rescue at Dunkirk.

Just hours before Nazi Germany's invasion of France in May 1940, Parliament appointed the former First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, as prime minister. Britain's new leader had been a staunch opponent of Hitler and the Nazis from long before the war. On taking up his new office, he famously told cabinet colleagues that he had "nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat".

Churchill himself gave the order for Operation Dynamo and did not hesitate to term the evacuation a miracle. At the same time, civilians and the British press cheered the way in which a looming disaster had been turned into some kind of triumph. The navy's successful rescue of the British and French forces at Dunkirk boosted British morale and ensured that Britain had sufficient soldiers to defend itself and its wider interests. The evacuation also erased any notion of there being peace talks with Nazi Germany.

Upon their return, the majority of the soldiers were deployed to defend Britain from a German invasion.





dead and severely wounded soldiers, who were unable to find shelter from the German artillery bombardment.

For an hour, Colvin and his men carried the helpless men aboard the small boats that were still ferrying troops from the beach. But the Germans' roaming fighter planes eventually made the rescue action so lethal that Colvin had to order his soldiers to retreat. Unlike a few days earlier, when the army had prioritised evacuating the wounded, now they would be left to the Germans and the tide.

British Lieutenant Julian Warde-Aldam described the scene: "The ground was flowing (literally) in blood, and the cries of the wounded, as they clutched at our ankles as we went past, were heart-rending...there was nothing we could do for them."

During 3rd June, the last British soldiers were rescued from Dunkirk. At the same time, around 60,000 French soldiers were still struggling to defend the port city and buy time for the rest to escape across the Channel.

### LAST SHIP LEFT DUNKIRK

The next day, the evacuation of the French got under way in earnest and almost 20,000 soldiers were transported to England. But on 4th June, the German field guns were so close that the risk to the "Little Ships" eventually became too great. About 40,000 French soldiers were left to fend for themselves, while their senior officers were evacuated. French general, Robert Barthélemy, reported the scenes when the last ship left Dunkirk.

"About 1,000 men stood to attention four deep about halfway along the pier, the general and his staff [being] about 50 feet away.... After having faced the troops, whose faces were indiscernible in the dawn light, the flames behind them showing up their steel helmets, the officers clicked their heels, saluted, and then turned about, and came down to the boat with me. We left at 03.05."

The boat sailed them out to the French destroyer *Shikari*, which was a few hundred metres from the coast. The warship's deck was filled with French soldiers who could hear the fire fight at the outskirts of the city between their surviving French comrades and the German troops. At 04.00, *Shikari* – the last ship to leave Dunkirk – set sail. Operation Dynamo had successfully evacuated 338,226 men, but 68,111 were left behind – abandoned or dead.

# Material loss was huge

The rapid evacuation from Dunkirk forced Allied soldiers to leave most of the army's heavy equipment on the French beaches.

**SHIPS** A fleet of large and small ships from Britain and its allies took part in the operation, but they didn't all return.

**6** British destroyers were sunk during the evacuation.

**297** vessels – both military and civilian – were lost.

**AIRCRAFT** Spitfires and Hurricanes fought to protect the waiting soldiers, as well as ships in the English Channel.

**145** RAF planes were destroyed by the Luftwaffe, including 42 Spitfires.

**VEHICLES** Over 80,000 different vehicles were left behind. Some were destroyed, but many were taken by the Germans.

**432** tanks.

**20,548** motorcycles.

**63,879** other vehicles, including jeeps and trucks.

**ARTILLERY AND SUPPLIES** Artillery guns as well as many tons of ammunition and fuel were left behind.

**2,472** guns of different calibres.

**76,097** tons of ammunition.

**164,929** tons of fuel.

**415,940** tons of supplies.

Bombed vehicles were used as jetties where vessels could be tied up while boarding troops. Elsewhere, soldiers had to wade into the water to get to the boats.



*British pilots were always on alert.  
Spitfires were expected to be in the air  
ten minutes after German planes  
appeared on the radar.*



# 1940

**10<sup>TH</sup> JULY**





THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

# BRITISH PILOTS HOLD OFF THE LUFTWAFFE

In the summer of 1940 a battle breaks out that will last for 114 days. First, the Luftwaffe attack merchant ships in the English Channel, then the Germans smash British radar installations and air bases before relentlessly bombing London.

But the British “few” are stubborn.



## THE STAGE IS SET



In June 1940, Hitler's blitzkrieg attack crushes France with lightning speed. The Nazis only need to defeat Britain before all of Western Europe is in their grasp. The British stubbornly refuse to surrender, however – not least the Royal Air Force, which proves to be a far more dangerous enemy than the Germans expected.



**A**FTER A GREY AND DRIZZLY MORNING, the sun shone again over Dover's white cliffs on Wednesday, 10th July 1940. The sunbeams sparkled on the water as a convoy of freight ships passed. The vessels looked like small toys placed in an idyllic model landscape. It was a beautiful summer day in southern England.

But fighter pilot John Thompson did not have time to enjoy the view from his cockpit.

His eyes were trained firmly on a formation of German bombers that approached with deadly intent, ready to drop their deadly payload on to the convoy below. While anti-aircraft guns fired from the beach, Thompson took charge of 12 Hurricane fighters, flying directly towards the enemy planes. The two formations approached each other at a combined speed of 900 km/h.

Suddenly the bombers turned and fled. Thompson followed, took aim and fired his aircraft's machine guns. One enemy bomber crashed into the ocean leaving a trail of smoke behind it. From the beach, local residents watched as the combatants swarmed around one another.

The aerial fight was the first significant incident in what would become known as the Battle of Britain. The conflict was history's first major air battle, and the 114-day onslaught would not only allow Britain to maintain air superiority over her own islands, but would also mark a turning point in WWII. Until

## 63 schools

trained pilots for the Luftwaffe in 1940. The German air force possessed around 5,000 highly trained pilots who could be sent into the skies over Britain.

then, 1940 had seen a heady series of triumphs for the Third Reich. In April, German troops had effortlessly taken Denmark and Norway, and in May, Holland, Belgium and France fell too. The United States had remained neutral and the Soviet Union was willingly cooperating with the Germans. Only Britain now stood in the way of a Europe united under the shadow of the swastika. The only question was how long she could hold out?

British troops had been stationed in France since the war broke out in September 1939, but in the summer of 1940, Hitler's apparently unstoppable army had pushed the British back to the Dunkirk beaches, from where they were evacuated at the last minute before being pushed into the sea. Thousands of weapons and trucks as well as several tonnes of ammunition and fuel were left on the beaches. It was a military disaster for Britain, which was left on the brink of collapse.

"Final victory over England is now only a matter of time," concluded Germany's Chief of Staff Alfred Jodl.

## CHANNEL'S FREIGHT SHIPS WERE THE TARGET

Operation Sea Lion, as the German invasion plan was codenamed, was due to deliver the killer blow. It was based on the Blitzkrieg principle – the combination of infantry, tank and air bombardments that had brought the Germans success throughout Europe. Hitler, however, had no illusions

NAME **HERMANN GÖRING**  
TITLE REICH MARSHAL

## Airman became supreme commander

An airman from WWI, fighter pilot Hermann Göring was one of Hitler's right-hand men from 1933. Göring created the Gestapo, but left it to Heinrich Himmler in 1935 in favour of a job as commander-in-chief of the Luftwaffe. After the Germans' lightning victory in 1939-40, Göring was made supreme commander of the entire Wehrmacht – a position he kept throughout war. He was also Hitler's deputy.

- > Given Grand Cross of the Iron Cross.
- > Committed suicide in prison.



NAME **HUGH DOWDING**  
TITLE AIR MARSHAL

## War veteran countered Hitler's plan

Hugh Dowding had been a fighter pilot in World War I, and was appointed head of the Royal Air Force in 1936. In addition to managing the RAF at the beginning of World War II, he was also the architect of an integrated air defence system. It included a messaging system whereby radar observations were promptly analysed and passed on to the RAF, which took to the air as soon as an observation was verified as a genuine attack.

- > Retired from the RAF in 1942.
- > Was made a baron in 1943.





about the task ahead. Since the battle of Hastings in 1066, no one had managed to cross the Channel and invade Britain. He had to get rid of the Royal Air Force (RAF), otherwise his fleet and army would be unable to land on British soil.

The Nazis transferred bombers and fighters to newly built bases in northern France and began bombing ships in the English Channel. The Germans termed these attacks *Kanalkampf* (Channel war), their purpose being to cut Britain's supply lines while destroying as many British aircraft as possible.

Many of the German pilots had served in Condor Legion, during the Spanish Civil War. Their experience had led them to develop a loose flight formation that was better suited to dog fights than the traditional V-formation the British used. With its superior tactics, combat-hardened pilots and new aircraft, the German Luftwaffe ought to have been superior.

### CHURCHILL: "WE WILL NEVER SURRENDER"

Although Hitler and his staff planned Operation Sea Lion down to the smallest detail, they didn't believe a real military invasion would be necessary. Hitler assumed that Britain would recognise "her militarily hopeless situation" and that a small push would be enough to make the British surrender and sign a peace accord on German terms.

Much had changed since October 1938, however, when Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had signed the Munich Agreement with the German dictator in the hope of there being "peace for our time". Winston Churchill had been appointed to the office on the same day the German tanks had rolled into France and he was not a man to be easily intimidated. After the last British troops had been evacuated from Dunkirk, he declared that "We shall go on to the end... We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; We will never surrender."

### AGGRESSIVE TACTICS SURPRISED THE GERMANS

The Luftwaffe was therefore surprised at the dogged resistance it met over the English Channel. The RAF had just over 600 modern fighter planes, half the German number. But in spite of Britain's unquestionable numerical inferiority in both pilots and machines, they shot down ten German aircraft on the first day for the loss of just two planes.

Technically, the British fighter planes were more on a par with their German counterparts, and the RAF was a tougher opponent than the poorly equipped air forces that the German pilots had been up against until that point. In addition, the British had the advantage that German fighters had to use fuel to cross the Channel and fight over enemy territory. Thus, they only had a short time to engage the enemy before they had to return home – if they could.

In the bitter fighting that followed, one of the British squadrons developed a bold tactic. Instead of flying over the German bombers and turning to attack them from behind, they flew directly towards the German aircraft while firing their machine guns. This approach made it easier for the

*The Royal Air Force was established in 1918 as an independent unit and is the world's oldest air force.*



British to target their enemies and forced the German pilots to turn to avoid a collision. This made them even easier to hit. But it was a dangerous tactic and RAF fighters did sometimes collide with German foes.

For almost a month, German attacks continued on British ships and ports. And although British fighters tried to protect the convoys, many cargo ships with vital supplies were sunk. Losses in the air were high on both sides, but the RAF accounted for most 'kills'; between 10th and 23rd July, the British lost 45 aircraft to the Luftwaffe's 82.

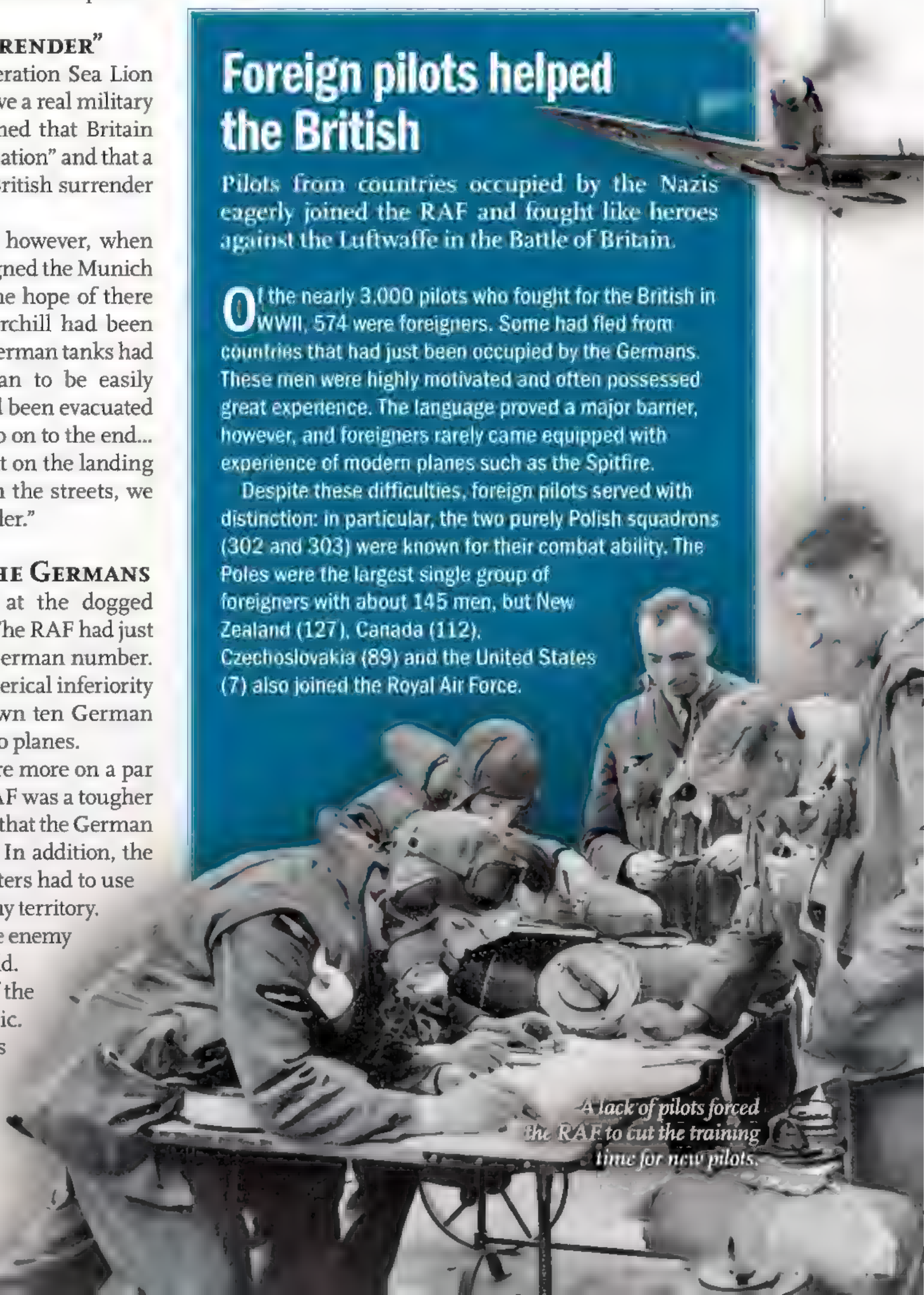
It didn't take the Germans long to realise that they needed to change their strategy to counter the skill and determination of the RAF pilots. Consequently they began to focus on destroying British airbases, aircraft and radar equipment. Head of the Luftwaffe, Hermann Göring,

## Foreign pilots helped the British

Pilots from countries occupied by the Nazis eagerly joined the RAF and fought like heroes against the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain.

**O**f the nearly 3,000 pilots who fought for the British in WWII, 574 were foreigners. Some had fled from countries that had just been occupied by the Germans. These men were highly motivated and often possessed great experience. The language proved a major barrier, however, and foreigners rarely came equipped with experience of modern planes such as the Spitfire.

Despite these difficulties, foreign pilots served with distinction: in particular, the two purely Polish squadrons (302 and 303) were known for their combat ability. The Poles were the largest single group of foreigners with about 145 men, but New Zealand (127), Canada (112), Czechoslovakia (89) and the United States (7) also joined the Royal Air Force.



*A lack of pilots forced the RAF to cut the training time for new pilots.*



## FIGHTERS

# Fighter plane was better equipped

The German Messerschmitt-fighter was both faster and better armed than the British Spitfire, but the Spitfire couldn't be beaten on manoeuvrability.

Both the British Spitfire and German Messerschmitt Bf 109 belonged to a new generation of combat aircraft. Germany developed the Bf 109 immediately after Hitler came to power in 1933, while the first Spitfire went into the air the following year in reaction to Germany's rearming. The two machines were well

matched although the Bf 109 was faster. The German plane also had the advantage in terms of weapons. In addition to two machine guns mounted on the hull, the Messerschmitts carried two 20-mm machine guns on its wings. The Spitfire only had 8-mm machine guns (four machine guns on each wing).



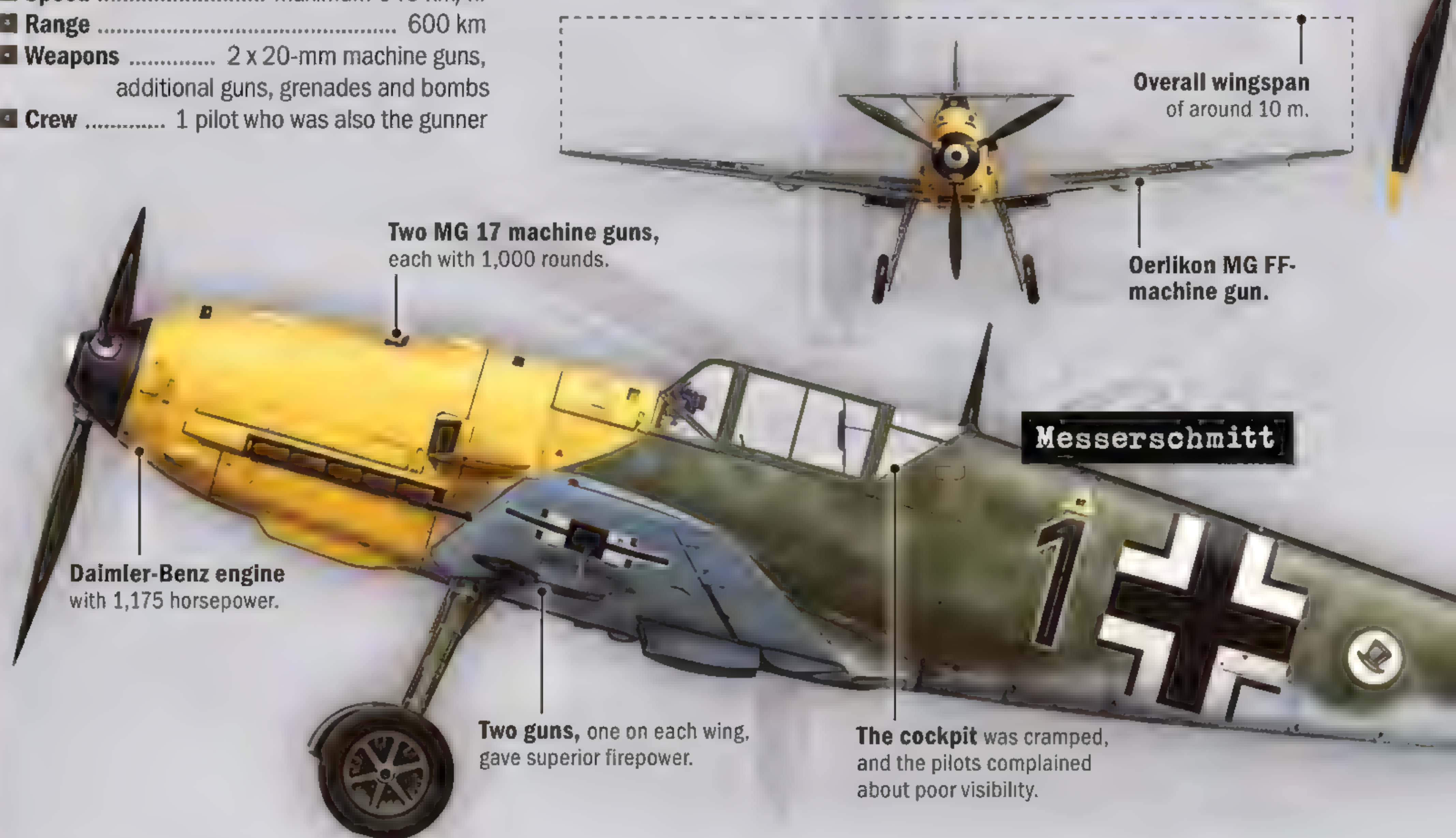
## Messerschmitt could fly higher

Range was a challenge during the Battle of Britain. With a full tank, a Messerschmitt Bf 109 could fly 600 kilometres, which only gave it 10 minutes flight time over London before having to return. On the other hand, the Bf 109 could fly higher than British planes.

- **Take-off weight**..... maximum 3,400 kg
- **Speed** ..... maximum 640 km/hr
- **Range** ..... 600 km
- **Weapons** ..... 2 x 20-mm machine guns, additional guns, grenades and bombs
- **Crew** ..... 1 pilot who was also the gunner

## BEST ENGINE

■ The Daimler-Benz direct fuel injection engine provided the Bf 109 with an even supply of fuel during violent manoeuvres that the Spitfire's engine couldn't match.



threw himself into the task with zeal: "The Führer has ordered me to crush Britain with my Luftwaffe", he declared proudly.

## GERMANS ATTACKED RADAR STATIONS

Operation *Adlerangriff* (Eagle Attack) became the code name of a series of German raids designed to break the RAF. The first one came on 12th August, when a group of German bombers attacked radar stations on the south coast of

England. Britain's radar system was one of the RAF's greatest assets. The attack knocked out several radar stations, and a few hours later, the Nazis sent around 220 bombers and fighters from southern Germany to bomb RAF airbases.

After a few hours the radar system was operational once again. The following day a fresh wave of bombers swept over the bases and more devastation followed. Both hangars and the planes inside were destroyed, workshops were flattened





## Spitfire was an aerial acrobat

Rapid twists and turns in the air were the Spitfire's strength. The aircraft's wings were elliptical, resulting in great aerodynamics and manoeuvrability. If forced, the Spitfire could shake off its pursuant by rolling half a turn and then pulling out quickly from the subsequent dive.

- **Take-off weight** ..... maximum 2,651 kg
- **Speed** ..... 560 km/hr
- **Range** ..... 668 km
- **Weapons** ..... 8 x 7.69-mm machine guns
- **Crew** ..... 1 pilot who was also the gunner

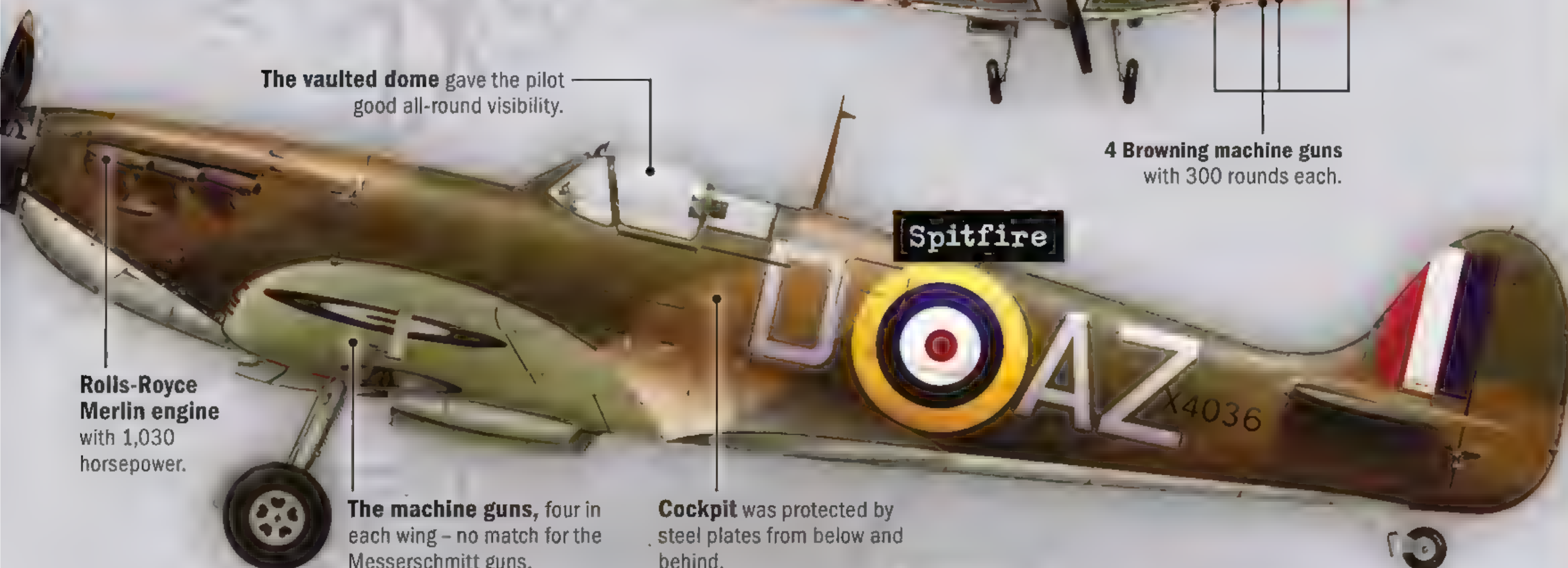


*Goggles protected fighter pilots' eyes—for example, if the window in the cockpit was broken.*



**Overall wing span**  
of around 11 m.

**4 Browning machine guns**  
with 300 rounds each.



**The vaulted dome** gave the pilot  
good all-round visibility.

**Rolls-Royce  
Merlin engine**  
with 1,030  
horsepower.

**The machine guns**, four in  
each wing – no match for the  
Messerschmitt guns.

**Cockpit** was protected by  
steel plates from below and  
behind.



*German fighter aircraft  
had the task of protecting  
bombers during their  
missions to Britain. The  
bombers didn't have  
enough firepower to  
defend themselves.*



and the telephone system was put out of action. Runways were bombed, grounding the pilots. Göring was convinced that the British only had about 450 fighters left and that the Battle of Britain would be over in a couple of weeks.

### AVIATION INDUSTRY WAS GIVEN PRIORITY

In fact, British aviation manufacturers had made sure that the RAF still had over 700 operational fighters. Having foreseen

such a targeted air campaign, Churchill had established the Ministry for Aircraft Production three months earlier, in May.

The ministry ensured that the British economy was on a war footing and manufacturers of aircraft and related products were given priority access to most raw materials.

Private industries, not least the automotive sector, also contributed by providing equipment and assisting with the operation of state-run aircraft factories.



Aircraft production grew at record pace in Britain just as the German air industry, which wasn't prioritised in the same way began to see a drop in manufacturing figures. From June to September 1940, Germany built 775 new Messerschmitt aircraft, whereas Britain delivered 1,900 new fighters – almost three times the number. It was Britain's ramped-up production that would eventually see off Göring's Luftwaffe.

In mid-August, the Germans began to concentrate attacks on the main RAF airbases, including Tangmere on the south coast and Kenley and Biggin Hill just south-east of London. During the last two weeks of August, Biggin Hill was bombed almost daily.

### LUFTWAFFE KILLED RAF'S BEST PILOTS

For several weeks, British pilots at Biggin Hill were sent up time and again to defend against the German fighters. After days without sleep, they were exhausted, and fatigue began to sap at their concentration and fighting ability.

The same was true at many of the other bases. On 15th August, the Luftwaffe bombed 2,200 British bases. In order to spare personnel at the hardest-hit airfields, the RAF began to rotate pilots between bases.

Along with his colleagues from 616 Squadron, Spitfire pilot Hugh Dundas was sent to

Kenley to relieve the pilots there. "It never occurred to us that we should not continue together indefinitely. And so we drank a little more than usual at lunchtime and went down to the airfield... eager to take off for Kenley and glory." They were met with a shocking sight: much of the base lay in ruins. The wreckage of planes and vehicles was all around the edge of the field and the landing area was pitted with bomb craters.

When Churchill concluded at the end of August that "never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few", he was recalling similar scenes.

The RAF was on the brink of collapse. On 24th August, the south-east coast base of Manston was virtually levelled by 20 Ju-88 bombers. After that, the base was closed and only served as an emergency landing ground. At the start of September, six out of seven bases belonging to Group 11 – the Jagger Group, which was defending

London – were almost wiped out. British planes were also being shot down at an alarming rate. Within two weeks – from 26th August to 6th September – the RAF lost 273 aircraft, and despite factories operating at maximum capacity, production could not keep up.

More disastrous still was the loss of pilots. After just ten days at Kenley, Dundas had lost most of his original 12 colleagues from 616 Squadron: five were killed or were declared missing in action and another five were injured. At the start of the Battle of Britain, the RAF was only training 65 pilots a week, but it was losing around 120 pilots every week. It was a situation that couldn't be sustained for long. In the end, the shortage of pilots became so desperate that training for new recruits was cut to just four weeks. Unfortunately, the new, fast-tracked pilots were far less effective than the men they replaced. Records detailing the pilots' victories showed that 80 percent of enemy aircraft were shot down by just ten percent of the pilots – the most experienced ones.

Many of the new pilots were simply sent into the air with only the most basic knowledge of flying. They had not learned how to operate the aircraft's machine guns and only a few had learned to fly in formation. This meant the new planes tended to drop out of formation, becoming easy prey for German fighters.

The RAF's senior commanders knew that Britain would lose the battle if the Germans continued their current strategy. The Germans, were also losing planes and pilots, but they had more to start with and they were slowly gaining

the upper hand, and the Luftwaffe could be forgiven for thinking the RAF was finished as a fighting force.

Hitler, however, was becoming impatient.

In retaliation for German bombers accidentally hitting London, the British bombed Berlin. The reprisals infuriated Hitler, because the Nazis had promised the German people that Berlin would never be attacked. He also believed that a change in strategy might force the stubborn British to surrender, which would allow him to focus on the Soviet Union. Rotterdam and Warsaw had shown what carpet bombing could do to a city – now it was London's turn.

Nearly a thousand German aircraft participated in the first attack, which came late in the afternoon on 7th September. The bombs hit the docks where a gasworks exploded in a huge fireball. The docklands were in flames. An ammunition depot and a residential area were also hit. 306 were killed.

"Explosions were everywhere, there just was not a break, bang after bang after bang," George Turnbull, a London home guard recalled. "The clang of bells from fire service vehicles and ambulances were drowned out by these bombs... God, this seemed to go on for hours."

The Luftwaffe bombed London daily for almost two months. The Blitz – as the attacks became known – hit hardest in the poor residential areas of London's East End.

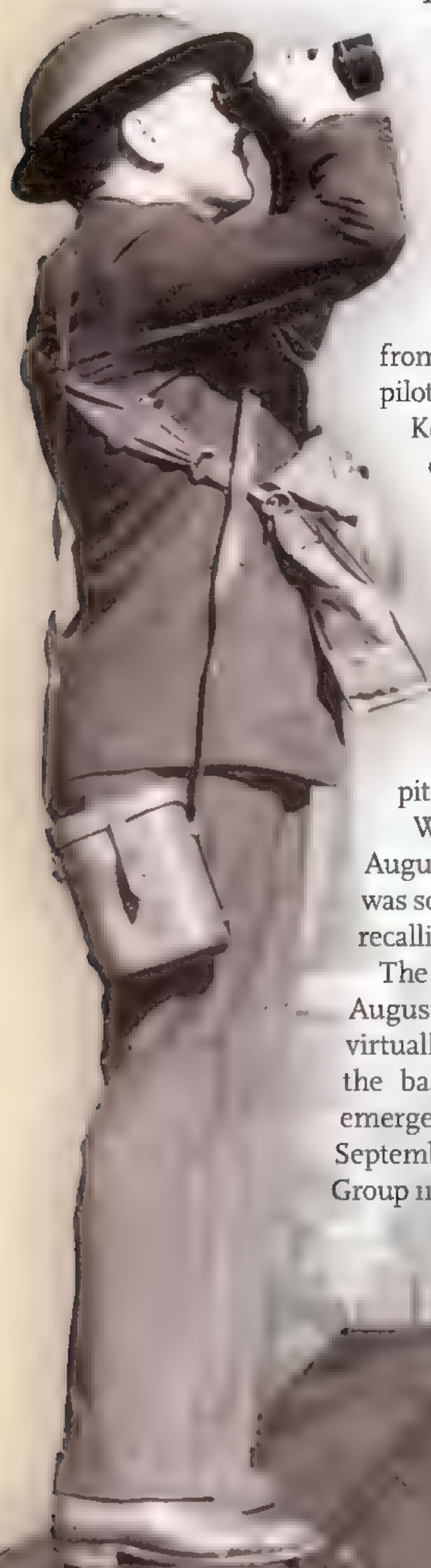
### BRITONS WERE STRONG AND UNITED

East Enders were forced into crowded and dirty shelters, without toilets or sanitation. The government deliberately refused to build large, comfortable shelters as it dreaded the idea that people would want to stay in them permanently. If

### The Hurricane

was an RAF workhorse. The fighter was not as fast as the Spitfire, but it was easier to produce being composed of a canvas skin over a metal airframe.

*A corps of flight observers watched all flights across England from July 1940 – 24 hours a day every day of the week.*





# British radar could see all the way to France

Both Britain and Germany used primitive radar, but, unlike the German system, the British radar system was connected to the Chain Home system, which made it highly efficient.

From the east coast of Scotland to the west coast of Wales 29 radar stations with tall transmitter masts 'bombarded' the space in front of them with radio waves to detect planes. The system had a range of over 80 km, so the British knew as soon as a German squadron took off from their bases in northern France, Radar determined the hostile

aircraft's distance, altitude and speed. To prevent the enemy flying under the radar, low-level systems were developed that could detect aircraft at lower altitudes, albeit at a more limited distance. Once the planes reached Britain, observers followed them with binoculars. In cloudy weather, a plane's course and height were gauged from its engine noise.

*British transmitter masts worked well, but they could only look forwards*

✕ British air bases  
✕ German air bases



*Binoculars replaced the outward-facing radar network when planes came inland.*

daily life ground to a halt, morale would fall, or so the argument went. For the same reason, the government asked the press to write about parties and party gatherings in London and Churchill raged when he heard that well-off families had sent their children out of the city.

The hard-pressed residents of the East End continued their daily routine as well as they could – largely because they had no other choice. Over time, their disrupted days found new rhythms. Housewives swapped tips on how to

make meat and vegetables last throughout the week along with news about who'd been 'bombed out' of their homes while queuing for their rations.

Folk came together in basements and on underground platforms during raids waiting for the 'All Clear' signal telling them that the streets were safe again – for now.

Even though casualties were high and the inhabitants were exhausted due to lack of sleep and rationing, the heavy bombing of the English capital didn't break British resolve as Hitler had hoped. After the first night's



attacks, American newspaper journalist Edward Murrow wrote:

"This night bombing is serious and sensational. It makes headlines, kills people and smashes property, but it doesn't win wars ... [and] will not cause this country to collapse."

### A MUCH-NEEDED BREAK

Murrow had read the situation correctly. The shift from bombarding airbases to civilian areas gave the RAF much-needed breathing room. The airbases were repaired, pilot numbers grew, and the industry was once again able to meet the force's demand for new aircraft. On 15th September, when the Luftwaffe arrived over London for what would prove to be the decisive battle of the air campaign against Britain, the skies were filled with Spitfire and Hurricane fighters.

The day was an unmitigated disaster for the Luftwaffe. A furious Göring blamed the fighter pilots, claiming they had let down the rest of the German air force.

Two days later, Hitler's Operation Sea Lion was postponed indefinitely. The nightly bombings of London continued over

*Ankle straps held a pilot's boots on his feet if he had to parachute from the plane.*



the coming months, but Germany really lost the Battle of Britain on 15th September. After October, the number of raids dropped, but they didn't stop completely until May 1941. By then the Blitz had taken more than 20,000 lives in London alone. Large parts of the city were devastated, and other cities across Britain were also affected. In total, civilian casualties across the country numbered close to 43,000 killed and 46,000 injured.

British morale and self-belief was boosted by the confrontation with the Luftwaffe. Britain was the first country to have resisted the modern German war machine – and shown that Hitler was not invincible, after all. Of course, Britain continued to be blockaded by German U-boats, warships and bombers who cut the country's supply lines, but she was an island fortress that had once again resisted invasion. With Churchill at the helm and sensible rationing of food and fuel, the British knew they could last for a long time.

Three years later, bombers came in their thousands again over southern Germany, only this time their pilots were British and their targets were German cities...

## London's volunteers worked night after night

A combination of voluntary fire workers, barrage balloons and British anti-aircraft guns kept up the morale of London's beleaguered citizens.

"Send all the bloody pumps you've got – the whole world's on fire", the message sounded when the first German bombs hit London's docks in the afternoon of 7th September. At the beginning of the Blitz in the autumn of 1940, the city's volunteer fire service numbered 25,000, many of them women.

In order to protect particularly vulnerable targets, the British set up barrage balloons. The large, silver-coloured balloons were tethered above the potential target by steel cables, which prevented bombers from flying at low altitude.

*Despite violent daily bombings, Londoners continued their daily lives as best they could.*



Anti-aircraft guns were also set up alongside powerful search lights which picked out targets for the shooters. They weren't particularly effective, but the air-defence guns contributed to a sense of safety that helped reinforce morale.



*The London Fire Service worked 24 hours a day to put out the many fires in the city.*



# Losses clipped Luftwaffe's wings

The 114-day battle over Britain cost the German Luftwaffe around half of its planes. Losses of the large Heinkel bomber were particularly high and proved difficult to replace.

The Battle of Britain was one of the most significant moments in recent military history. The RAF not only prevented an invasion of Britain, but convinced the United States that the country would be a reliable ally.

The RAF delivered an emphatic defeat to the Luftwaffe. The loss of so many German bombers put a damper on the German war effort for a long time to come. After its reprieve during the Blitz, the British were able to build new planes to replace lost ones, but the hard-pressed German air industry found it difficult to keep up.

During the Battle of Britain, the British built 2,354 new aircraft, while the Germans only managed 975. There was also a huge loss of lives, meaning Germany lacked pilots to fly the missions.

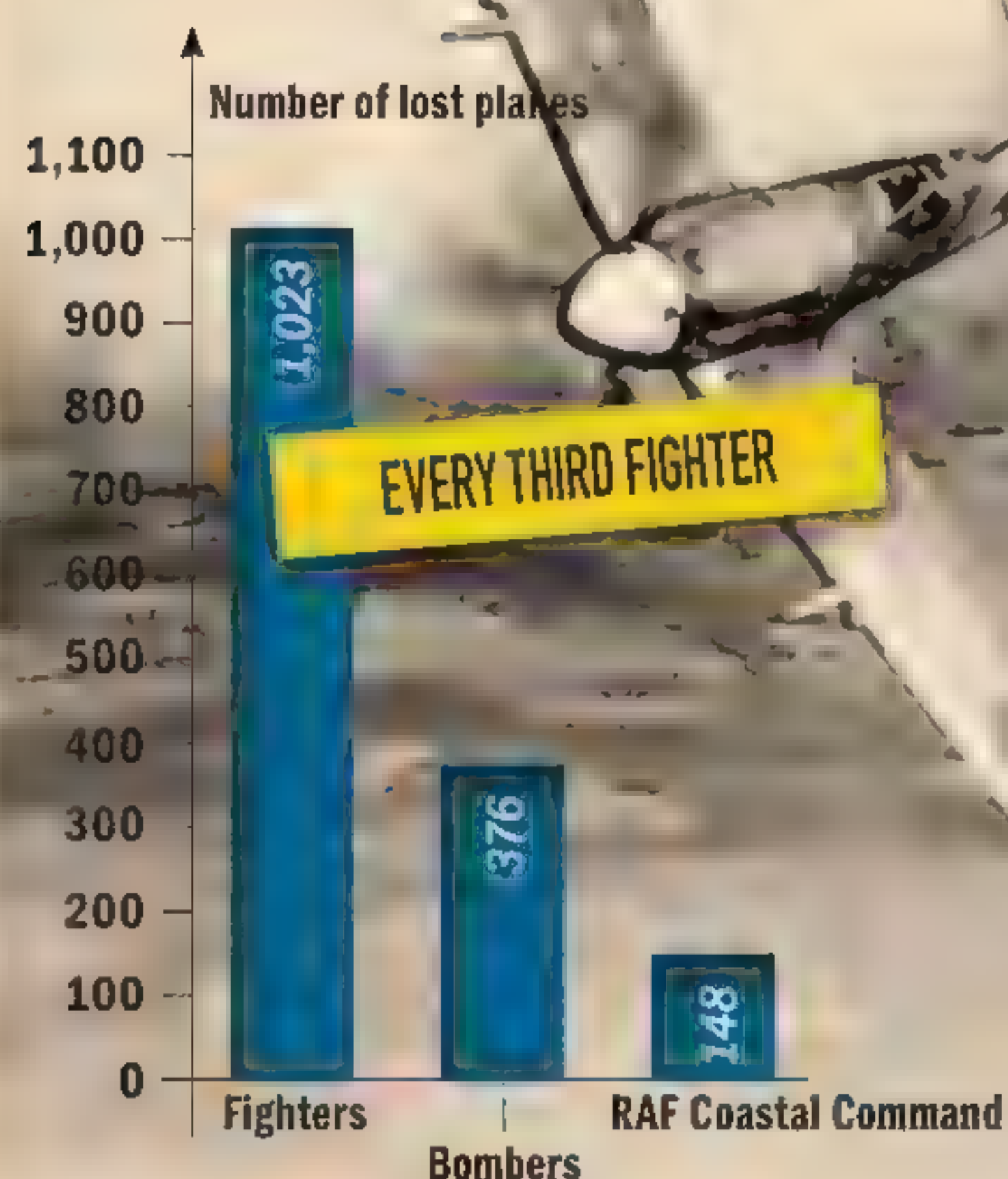


Luftwaffe's Heinkel He-111 was the Germans' strategic bomber at the start of the war.

## British losses



Even when fighters were destroyed, one in two pilots survived.

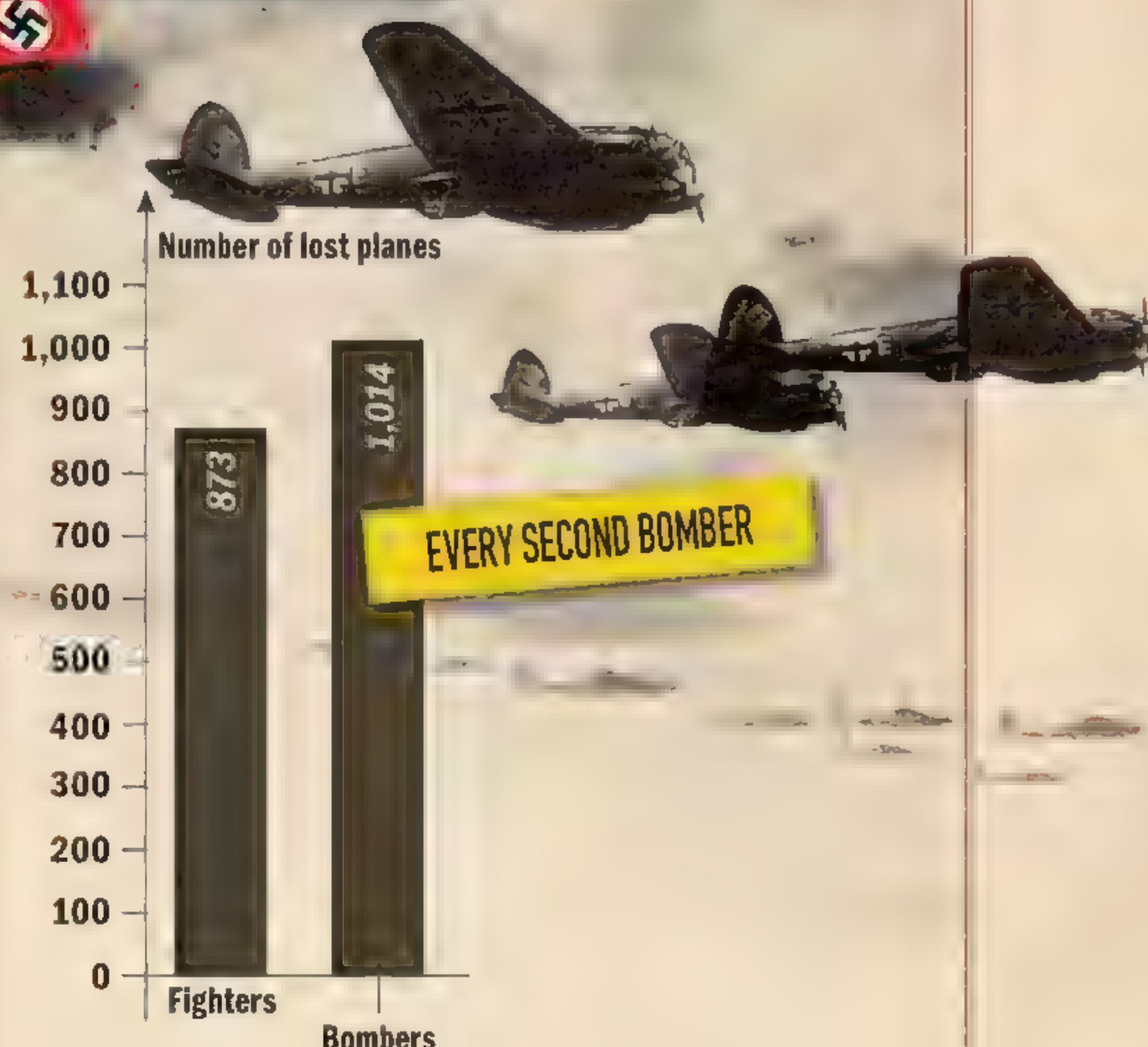


Total planes: **1,547** out of **1,963**

Personnel: **537**

Civilian loss: **43,000** killed  
**46,000** wounded

## German losses



Total planes: **1,887** out of **2,550**


Personnel: **2,662**

Civilian loss: In principle none, because the battle took place over Britain, but British reprisal bombings cost a smaller number of German lives.

German bombers had four men on board. They rarely survived a crash.







*In 1940, the Jews in the Polish city of Kutno were forced to move to a ghetto. In 1941, almost all of them were deported to concentration camps. Only 213 of the city's 6,700 Jews survived the war.*

1940



# LENIENT, HARSH AND INHUMAN

By the end of 1940, large parts of Europe were occupied by German or Soviet forces. The behaviour of the occupying forces varied from country to country. Denmark retained its independence and was treated leniently. France was used as a holiday resort for German soldiers, while the Poles lost the right to exist.

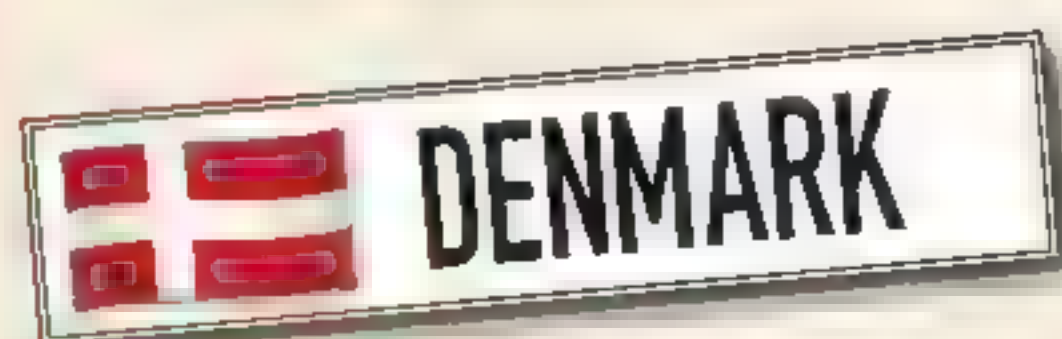




Worried about **poisonous gas attacks**, soldiers ran an air-defence exercise in Odense, Denmark, in 1940 in protective suits and gas masks.



A moulded rubber **gas mask** with glass-covered eyepieces protected the face, while air for breathing passed through an activated charcoal cleansing filter.



## Cooperation led to leniency

In April 1940, the Danish government signed an agreement to cooperate with the German occupying power in return for generous terms. The police, army and navy remained under Danish control, and the country avoided Nazification. During the first year, the war only really impacted the Danes in terms of blackouts, curfews, air-defence exercises and the rationing of goods. However, Germany's demands became increasingly tough over time, and in August 1943 the accord collapsed.



This poster reads the “waste that hurts us all”. The **blackout** of all lights was mandatory after Denmark fell on 9th April 1940 – six hours after being invaded.





*A little princess – later Queen Margrethe II – was born just one week after the occupation. She was baptised on 14th May at Holmen Church in Copenhagen.*



*A white dove with an olive branch – the universal symbol of peace – featured on a Danish Xmas stamp in 1940.*



*The Germany-Denmark international football match took place in November 1940 as though the invasion had never happened. Sporting events continued unchanged between the two nations until the autumn of 1941. The 1940 match ended in a 1-0 win for Germany.*

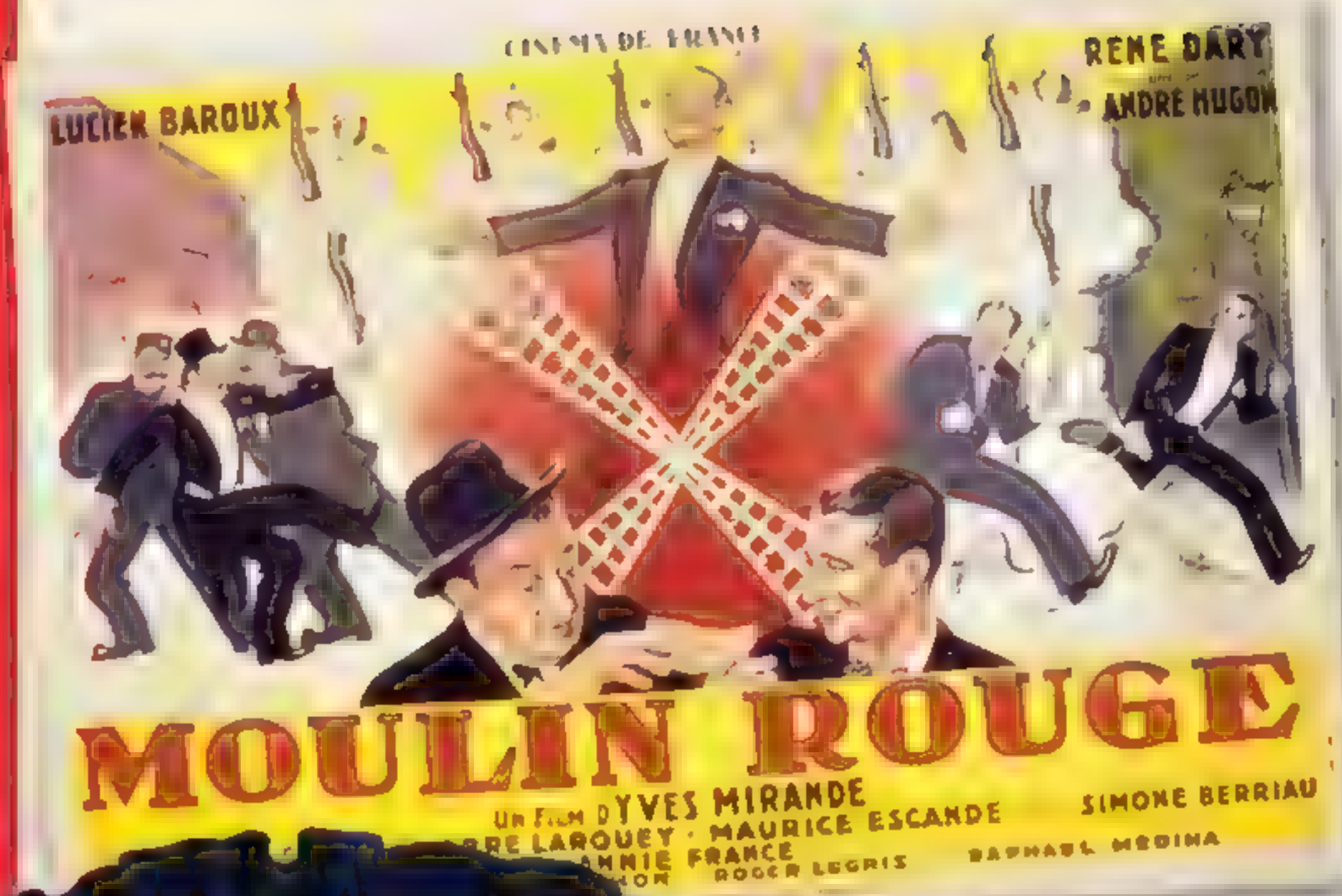


 FRANCE

## France paid for occupation

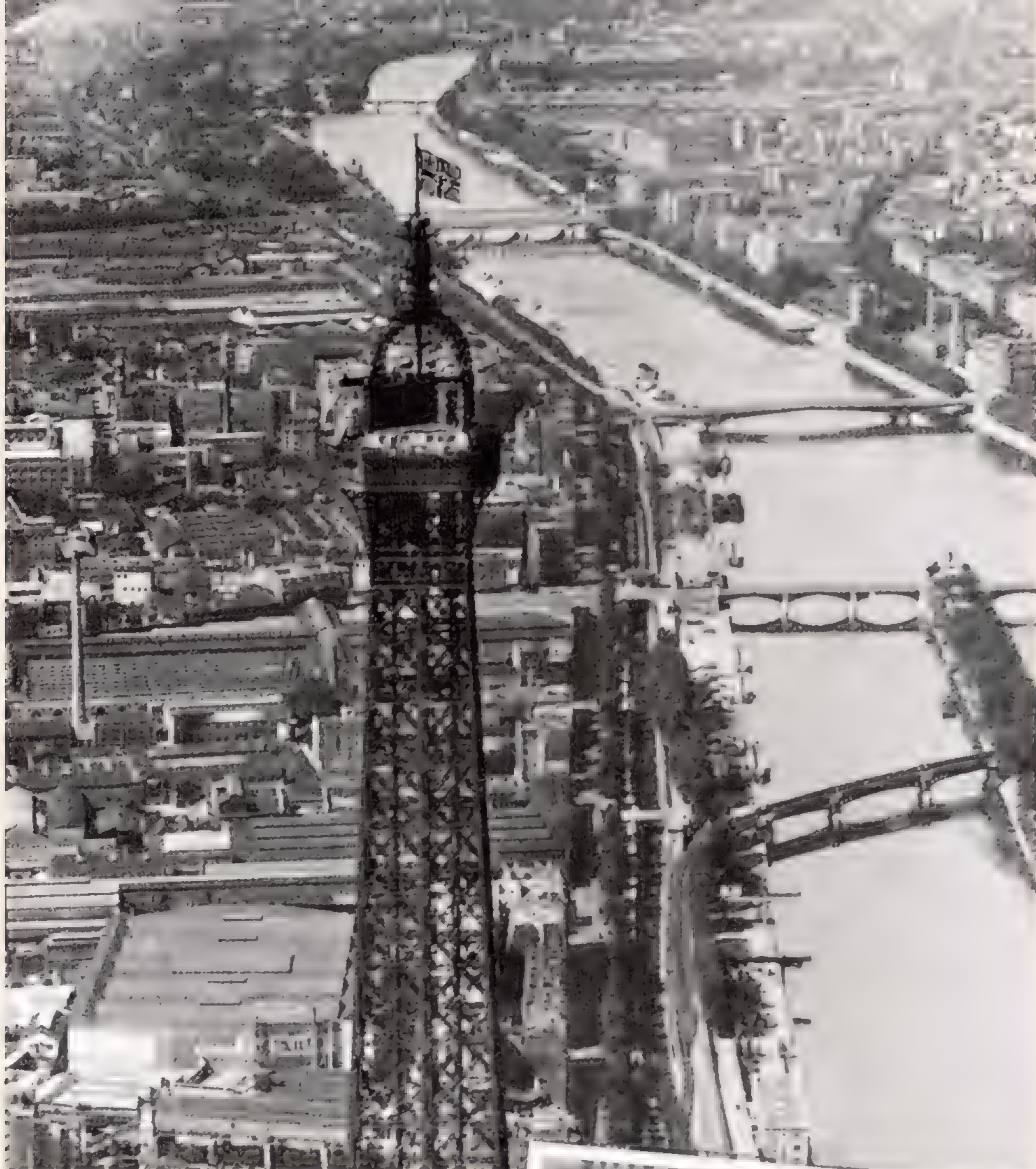
After its capitulation, France was divided into two zones: an occupied zone in the north under German military administration and an unoccupied zone in the south, ruled from Vichy by a French puppet government. Germany drained France of valuables and diverted much of the population's food to the 300,000+ German soldiers occupying the country.

Night life in Paris flourished during the war. The German soldiers had money in their pockets, and although there was a curfew, it was not always enforced.

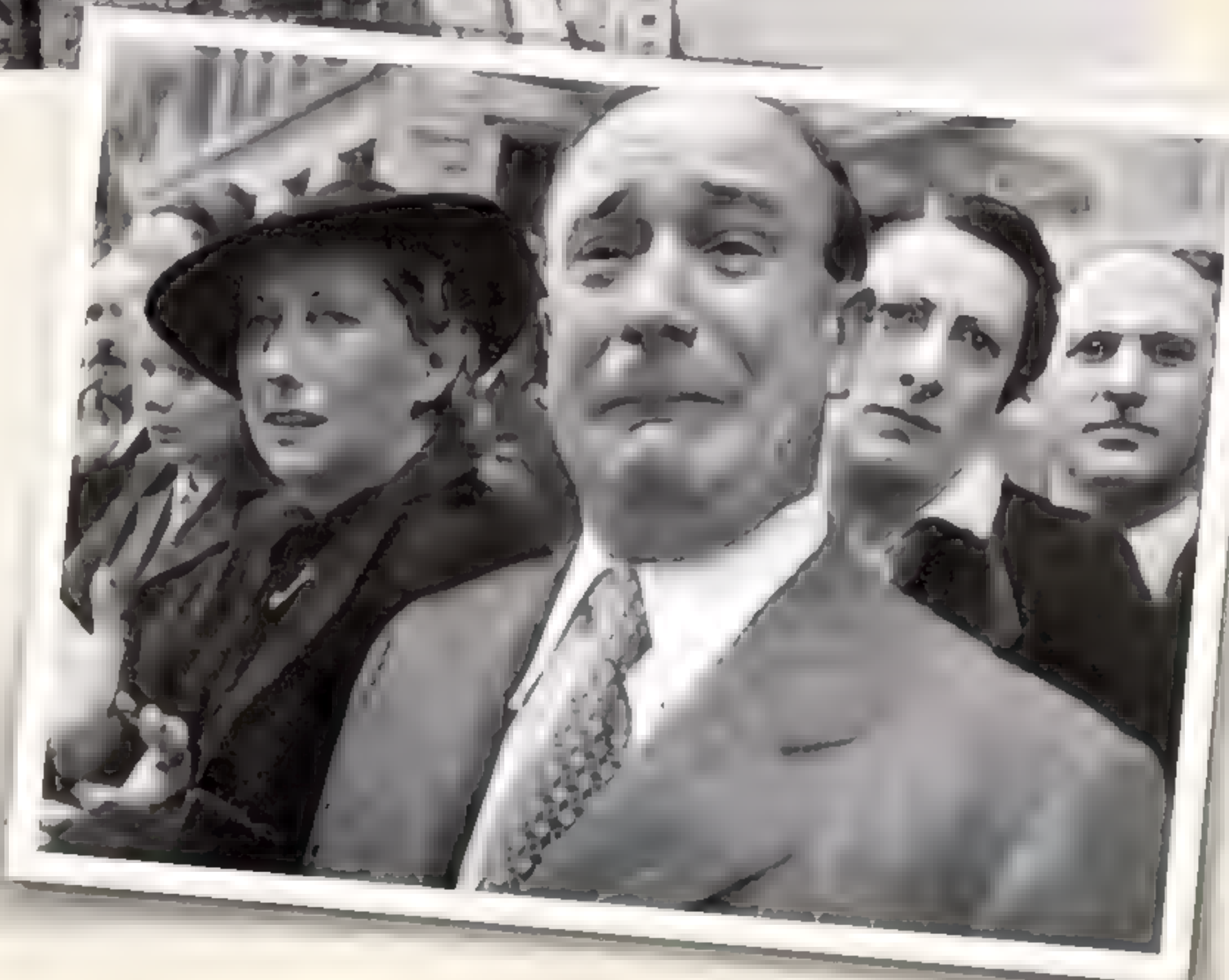


Visiting Paris was a reward for German soldiers after fighting on the front line. A guide to the City of Light, published in German shortly after France's occupation, recommended men go to the Moulin Rouge, where prostitutes would make soldiers feel welcome.





*A Nazi flag was raised on the Eiffel Tower on 13th June 1940, but German soldiers couldn't visit the tower's viewing platform as the lifts were damaged and weren't repaired until 1946.*



**The Germans' easy victory** was a shocking humiliation for the French. On paper, France had Europe's strongest army and a solidly fortified Maginot line. Yet it took Hitler's army just six weeks to reach Paris.

France's motto "**Liberty, Equality, Fraternity**" was changed to "**Work, Family, Fatherland**" on coins issued by the Vichy government.





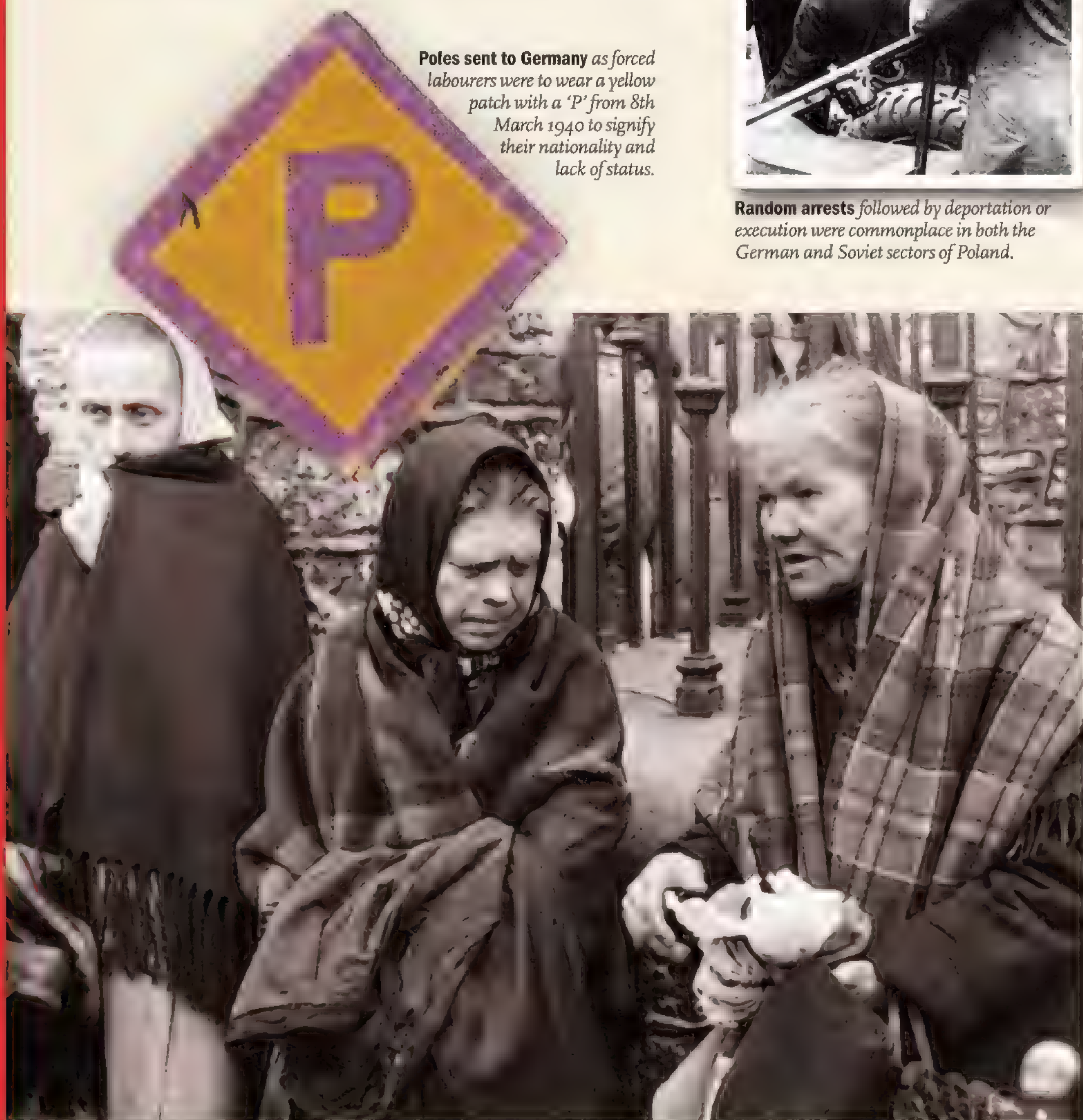
## Everyday deportation and death

Even before the invasion, Hitler and Stalin had agreed to divide Poland, and neither of the two occupying powers recognised the country's right to exist as an independent state. Polish inhabitants suffered from inhuman discrimination in both the east and in the west. They were arrested, deported to forced labour camps in the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany or simply executed. The war cost six million Polish lives – a quarter of the country's population. About half of those killed were Jews.

*Poles sent to Germany as forced labourers were to wear a yellow patch with a 'P' from 8th March 1940 to signify their nationality and lack of status.*

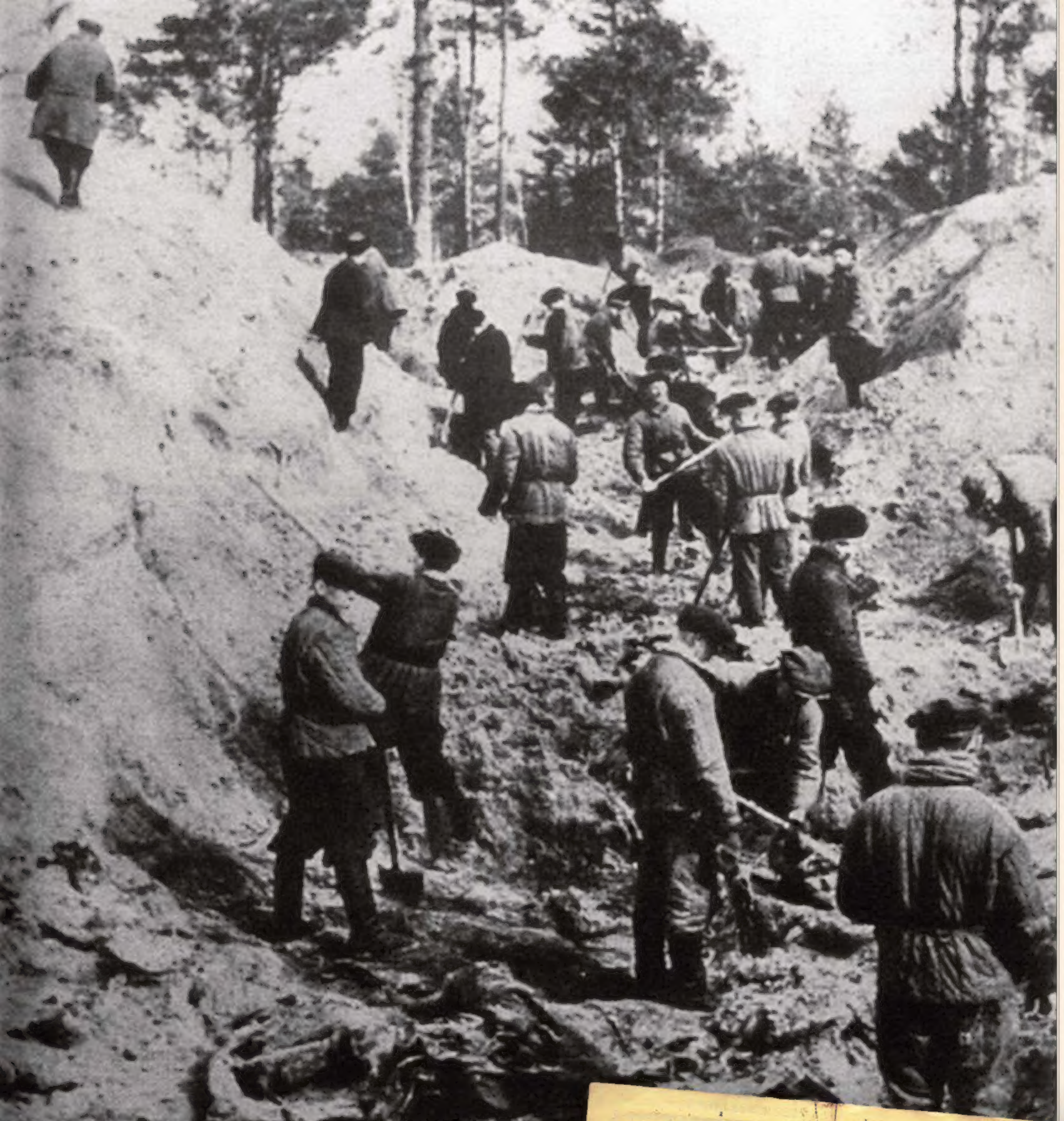


*Random arrests followed by deportation or execution were commonplace in both the German and Soviet sectors of Poland.*



*These Polish women were in Kraków during its occupation by the Germans. Like many of their fellow Poles, hunger is driving them to barter their belongings for food. The Poles were treated as untermenschen (sub-humans) by the Nazis and deprived of all rights.*





In spring 1940, around **22,000 POWs** were executed and buried in mass graves in the Katyn Forest in Russia. The Germans found the graves in 1943 and accused the Soviets of the massacre. The Soviets, in turn, accused the Germans of being behind it. It wasn't until 1990 that the Soviets admitted carrying out the atrocity.

**Doctor Zygmunt Sloninski** was a Polish major and one of around 8,000 Polish officers executed between April and May 1940 by the Soviet Security Service, NKVD, in the Katyn Forest.

Rysopis - Signaloments		
Pokrowstwa	16.4.	Pr.
Data de naitance		
Miejsc wrodzenia	Lond	p. Tupa
Lieu de naissance		
Nom	Zonaty	marie
Etat civil		
Katradnionis	lekaz	medicin
Profession		
Wrost	wysoki	grande
Taillo		
Waga	ciężka	ovale
Włosy	ciemne	blonde
Okaz	niebieskie	bleux
Okaz		
znaki szczególne	niebieskie	males
Signes particuliers		
Dzieci - Enfants		
Imię	Króć	Prze
Nazwisko	Slon	Slon

Telegraficzny  
ARCTA GROSZKI POZNAN  
Zygmunt Sloninski  
Doktor Zygmunt Sloninski



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Dr. Stocker/Bundesarchiv, Günther Thiede/BPK, ullstein bild/Ritzau Scanpix, www.wehrmacht-awards.com, Shutterstock

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### PETROL & SUGAR ARE WORTH MORE THAN GOLD

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# "All my life I've gone for broke"

Adolf Hitler spoke those words to Hermann Göring after the invasion of Poland on 1st September 1939. Along with other high-ranking German commanders, Göring was urging the Führer to be more cautious in his dealing with the powers of Western Europe. Six months earlier, France had promised to help Poland in the event of a German attack, but Hitler, who always played for high stakes, sensed they were bluffing and he was right. The attack on Poland triggered declarations of war, but nothing more. It took another six months before the French started fighting, but by then it was too late...

